

# UNION SQUARE MASTER PLAN



BPG | Bluestone Planning Group

April 2003

City of Somerville, MA

Mayor Dorothy A. Kelly Gay

Office of Housing and Community Development

Stephen M. Post, Executive Director





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# UNION SQUARE MASTER PLAN / Phase II

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### ***OHCD / Office of Housing and Community Development***

- ❑ Stephen M. Post, Executive Director, OHCD
- ❑ Christine Wrigley, Director, Commercial & Economic Development, OHCD
- ❑ Brian Harris, Project Manager, OHCD

### ***Consultant Team***

#### ***BPG / Bluestone Planning Group***

- ❑ Lawrence Bluestone, AIA, *Principal, Project Manager*

#### ***Larry Koff & Associates***

- ❑ Larry Koff, AICP, *Principal*

#### ***Stull and Lee, Inc.***

- ❑ M. David Lee, FAIA, *Principal*
- ❑ Pallavi Kalia, *Urban Designer*

#### ***Howard / Stein-Hudson Associates, Inc.***

- ❑ Anne McKinnon, *Senior Transportation Planner*

#### ***Todreas Hanley Associates, Inc.***

- ❑ Carol Todreas, *Principal, Retail and Marketing*
- ❑ Jivan Colabawalla, *Retail and Marketing*



## DEDICATION

The Master Plan is dedicated to the memory of Michael A. Campbell, city planner and lifelong Somerville resident, who directed the city's first major revitalization effort in Union Square during the 1980's.





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## INTRODUCTION

Union Square and its broader Study Area includes Somerville's oldest commercial business district at its center and several surrounding close-knit residential neighborhoods. The Study Area also includes outlying business corridors and many industrial and warehouse properties that had historically located near the Fitchburg Branch rail line located immediately south of the Square. Union Square also lies at the crossroads of some of Somerville's major arterial streets – including Washington Street, Somerville Avenue and Prospect Street; and, it includes the Bow Street Local and National Historic District and the historic Prospect Hill monument, which commemorates the location where the Revolutionary War's first colonial flag was raised. Over the years, Union Square's fortunes have risen and then declined. Today, Union Square is stable but not as vital as it could become. Fortunately, Union Square's prospects now appear to be on the rise once again. This Master Plan is crafted to capture that upward momentum and help guide that renaissance.

Throughout the past century, Union Square has served multiple roles, often simultaneously - as a commercial business district, an employment center for blue-collar manufacturing businesses, and as an entry portal to waves of international immigrants. Because of the diverse and multiple roles the Square has played in the past and still plays today, its current identity is not entirely clear. Therefore, to outsiders in particular, its image is not well defined.

The Square's current retail mix, best known for its many diverse restaurants and food markets, does not fully meet the shopping needs of surrounding neighborhoods, and the currently attainable rent levels in the Square do not yet financially support new commercial construction (although new housing development under certain conditions appears to be financially viable). The Square's streets are congested with pass through regional traffic; and although the Square is well-served by buses, it is not served by *rapid transit* – which puts the Square at a competitive disadvantage compared with other nearby better-served squares and commercial centers. Clearly, Union Square is vital but has not yet achieved its full potential, and its role in the future needs to be more clearly defined.

That future promises some major rapid transit improvement projects which will eventually transform the Square and its competitive role in the region. However, many of those promised transit-related transformations are at least five to ten years away. Therefore, a vision for Union Square's future and a strategy for the Square's transformation to that envisioned future – from the point of view of economic development, housing, urban design, land use and zoning, and transportation – must be crafted *in phases* and not overly rely in its early stages of transformation on the promised transit improvements of the future. It is the purpose of this Master Plan to suggest those strategies.

*“Over the years, Union Square’s fortunes have risen and then declined.....Fortunately, Union Square’s prospects now appear to be on the rise once again.”*



Union Square's diverse restaurants are widely known.



Union Square will become a transit center

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*“This Master Plan identifies new opportunities, weaves together previously-identified recommendations into a cohesive vision, and then defines a step-by-step Action Agenda.”*



Bow Street Police Station will be transformed into new uses.

#### *The Master Planning Process / Phase One and Phase Two*

For the past several years, the City of Somerville has focused much attention on the revitalization potential of Union Square. As a result, considerable momentum has already been gained in achieving that revitalization. Working closely with citizens, business organizations, and community organizations, the City prepared and completed the *Union Square Revitalization Study / Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area Plan (NRSA)* in the spring of 2002 after conducting a number of public forums and meetings. That five-year NRSA Plan, considered Phase One of the *Union Square Revitalization Study*, has already been approved by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). That approval allows the City increased flexibility in how it spends its available federal funds. From this process, the City gained a detailed picture of the Square's demographic and commercial profile, defined the Square's many strengths and assets, identified the challenges that remain before Union Square can achieve its full potential, and outlined a set of goals and strategies to achieve that potential. In the fall of 2002, the City also completed the *Union Square Transportation Plan* after a number of public meetings which suggested several alternative ideas for new roadway reconfigurations, pedestrian and bike improvements, Union Square Plaza improvements, parking strategies, and bus stop locations.

Based on these two completed efforts and other simultaneously-prepared feasibility studies for the reuse of the old Bow Street Police Station, the construction of a consolidated Public Safety Building in the Square, street and streetscape improvements for Somerville Avenue to the west of the Square, and the expansion of the Lincoln Park Community School, a number of design, land acquisition, and city property reuse initiatives are already underway. Taken together, these many proactive initiatives served as the foundation and starting point for this Phase Two Master Plan which began in the summer of 2002.

During the fall, winter and spring of 2002 and 2003, the recommendations of this Master Plan were crafted after many meetings and discussions with various property owners, business and community groups, and city staff. Three Public Forums were held to present progress findings and receive community feedback. Many positive ideas emerged during these discussions and forums that have been incorporated into this Plan. As a result, this Master Plan identifies new opportunities, weaves together previously-identified recommendations into a cohesive vision, and then defines a step-by-step Action Agenda for the City, the private sector, and the non-profit community to jointly pursue to achieve the desired outcomes.

#### *Master Plan Report Organization*

The organization of this Master Plan places focus on the Plan's recommendations, followed by a step-by-step phased Implementation Plan which identifies specific initiatives, the time-frame within which they should be accomplished, and the parties primarily responsible for their implementation so that progress can be monitored over the coming years. A detailed description of existing conditions and supporting analyses are provided in the Appendix.

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## I. UNION SQUARE TODAY

Union Square is a commercial business district and an historic crossroads where several major city arterials converge. It is closely surrounded by densely-populated moderate-income residential neighborhoods which help support the Square's commercial activity. Over the years, Union Square has served multiple roles – Somerville's oldest commercial core; a traditional neighborhood commercial center; an employment center for manufacturing businesses clustered around the Fitchburg rail line to the south of the Square, the Prospect Street corridor, and nearby Boynton Yards; and an entry portal to waves of international immigrants. At its peak in the early to mid twentieth century, Union Square was filled with activity, served by electric streetcars and trolleys, home to many retailers, and host to many commercial and apartment buildings three and four stories in height.

Today, Union Square is quite viable but is not flourishing or as vital as it once was. It is congested with traffic passing through the Square rather than destined for it. As the region's commuter rail and rapid transit system evolved in the twentieth century, Union Square was left as an island, isolated from and unserved by major regional transit connections. Much of its physical scale has actually diminished over time as well, from four and five story buildings to predominately one and two story buildings - reflecting its diminished commercial vitality. A variety of restaurants and food markets are today the primary source of the Square's strength and reputation. Many other small businesses fill the Square. They must compete, however, with other nearby neighborhood, community, and office commercial centers - such as Davis Square, Inman Square, Porter Square, Central Square, Harvard Square, Kendall Square and the Twin City Plaza - five of which are served by Red Line rapid transit service. As a result, many of Union Square's small businesses are just getting by rather than thriving.

Because of the diverse and multiple roles the Square has played in the past, and still plays today, its current identity is not entirely clear. To outsiders in particular, the district's image is not well defined. Its retail mix does not fully meet the shopping needs or desires of the surrounding neighborhoods and the currently prevailing rent levels in the Square do not yet financially support new commercial construction (although new housing development may be financially viable). Furthermore, the Square's streets are often severely congested with traffic. Although transit service to the Square is provided by several bus lines, that service is not equal to *rapid transit services* because those buses are slowed by the Square's traffic congestion and on-street traffic in general. Therefore, this lack of rapid transit services puts the Square at a competitive disadvantage compared with other nearby better-served squares and commercial centers. Clearly, Union Square has many strengths, but its vitality is now constrained by competing centers, the current mix and blighting influence of some of its land uses, traffic congestion, limited parking, and lack of rapid transit service.



Surrounding neighborhoods support the Square's commercial activity.

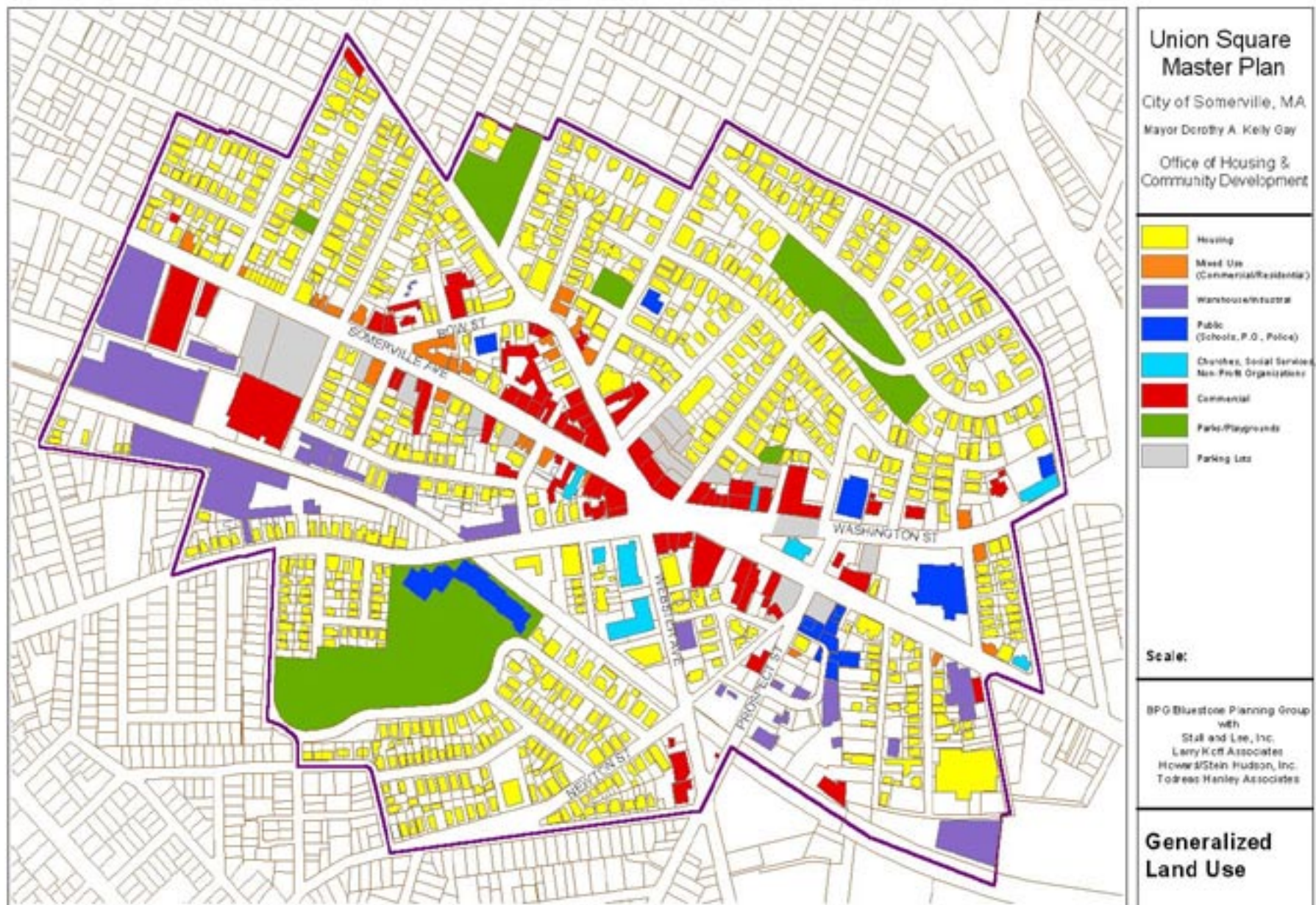


Union Square is isolated from and distant from surrounding MBTA stations.



In 1905 Union Square was filled with activity and served by electric streetcars.







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These problems and other related issues are reviewed below and documented more fully in *Appendix A* which also describes the Square's many opportunities and redevelopment initiatives underway. Some of the Square's existing characteristics and highlights are summarized below:

- Of the approximately one million square feet of space in Union Square, one third is allocated to office use (much of which is occupied by government users, non-profits, social service providers, and charitable organizations), one third to retail, and the balance to services and manufacturing. This mix of uses serves residents, employees, and customers from the neighborhood as well as the region. On the other hand, the mix of businesses unique to Union Square has particular problems which limit the vitality and growth of commercial activity. Restaurants, for example, are not sufficiently supported by the patronage that expanded office and service uses could provide. Likewise, some of the convenience and shopping goods sectors lack breadth and depth.

- Retail uses form a second dominant cluster around ethnic food stores and restaurants. These uses are one of the major draws in the Square. However, many of these restaurants, as well as some of the ethnic food stores, suffer from an insufficient customer base. The day-time customer, in particular, is lacking. The other components of the retail and service mix also vary from those of a "typical" neighborhood center. There is a void in traditional retail shopping goods and services (i.e. children, men, and family wear, banks, and convenience, health and beauty aids) If, however, one takes into account the recently opened Target store and A.J. Wright store at the eastern edge of the Square ¼ of a mile away, one would have to assume that these voids, other than specialty items, are now filled. Therefore, the likelihood of the Square attracting this mix into its core is now diminished unless smaller specialty stores can be attracted to the Square.

- The third dominate commercial theme in the Square are services and manufacturing. These are uses not found in a typical commercial center at the scale to which they exist in Union Square. Some of these uses are compatible with the district's retail theme. However, many others are inconsistent with maintaining a viable retail business district. In particular, the twenty auto and related establishments tend to detract from the quality of the retail center. These auto uses tend to occupy single story buildings utilizing a large portion of their lots for outdoor display, thereby negatively impacting the visual quality of the Square. Most of these auto uses are no longer allowed by zoning in the Square's CBD district and are therefore likely to eventually disappear from the Square's service mix through attrition and through redevelopment as property values rise. Likewise, some of the Square's manufacturing uses utilize their yard for materials storage and processing -activities which are incompatible with a thriving retail district.



The old Police Station is now occupied by offices.



Restaurants are a major draw to Union Square.



Auto uses are intermingled with Union Square's commercial core.



The old Union Square Fire Station, or SCAT building, is now leased by non-profit organizations.

- As mentioned above, almost one third of Union Square's commercial space is allocated to office use. However, much of this space is not rented to market-rate office users. Most is occupied by either local government (predominantly the Public Safety Building) or leased to non-profit cultural, civic, charitable and community social service organizations concentrated in the Square – including the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS), Somerville Head Start, the Boys & Girls Club, Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS), Catholic Charities, several shelters for women and the elderly, health clinics, and drop-in day centers. These organizations and uses tend to generate less economic activity for the Square than professional office users such as finance, legal, design, and real estate tenants.

Fortunately, the Square is changing once again and is on the verge of an upswing. Commercial property values are stable and housing prices and rents are rapidly increasing. The Square's eating and entertainment establishments are generating increasing publicity and "buzz" as the "next 'in' place to be"; and there is the expectation of new rapid transit services within the coming decade which promises to eventually transform the Square dramatically in the years ahead. However, many of these promised transit-related transformations are up to a decade away. Therefore, a vision for Union Square's future and a strategy for Union Square's transformation to that envisioned future - from the point of view of economic development, housing, urban design, land use and transportation - must be crafted in phased steps to coincide with market changes and scheduled transit improvements. It is the purpose of this Master Plan to suggest those strategies and phasing plans.

The City of Somerville and Union Square's businesses, neighbors and community organizations have been proactively working on the Square's revitalization for the past several years. The *Union Square Revitalization Study / Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area Plan 2002-2007* was completed in the spring of 2002 as the first phase of this Master Plan. Subsequently, the *Union Square Transportation Plan* was completed in the fall of 2002. As a result of these plans and other recent city-sponsored feasibility studies, the City, private sector, and non-profit sector have already taken a number of important initiatives:

- proposals for the disposition and reuse of the City's old Bow Street Police Station for new office, retail, and or housing uses;
- the feasibility study for an expansion of the Public Safety Building in the Square;
- a study of the expansion and reconstruction of the Lincoln Park Community School;
- several major non-profit and developer sponsored mixed-income housing communities such as the Linden Street development and Union Place;
- new developments such as the Family Center, Lino's, and the SA Coffee House;
- plans for new streetscapes along Somerville Avenue and reconfigured roadway circulation patterns throughout the Square; and
- the recent city-acquisition of the Kiley Barrel site for expanded public parking on an interim basis and eventual commercial and/or housing redevelopment.



The Kiley Barrel site was recently acquired by the city for eventual redevelopment.



**Union Square Master Plan**

City of Somerville, MA  
 Maps Division & Public City

Office of Housing & Community Development

**LEGEND:**  
 PUBLIC INITIATIVE (Blue)  
 PRIVATE INITIATIVE (Red)

**Scale:** 0' 100' 300'

**Blanton Planning Group with:**  
 Stull and Lee, Inc.  
 Larry Koff Associates  
 Howard/Stein-Hudson, Inc.  
 Todman Haskley Associates

**PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INITIATIVES**

The map displays various urban development projects in Union Square, Somerville, MA. Public initiatives (blue) include the New Public Safety Bldg, Potential Prospect St Gateway Area, and several street reconfigurations and renovations. Private initiatives (red) include the New Union St Housing, New L.P. School, and the New Public Safety Bldg. The map also shows the location of the Union Square Police Station and the Union Square Health Center.

## Union Square Master Plan / Phase II



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## II. UNION SQUARE TOMORROW: THE OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

### The Challenges

As the Union Square commercial district and its residential neighbors look to the Square's future, it faces many challenges that must be overcome if it is to return to the vibrancy of earlier years – in spite of its many strengths. Although many small businesses have made Union Square their home and have served as entry-level business opportunities for new immigrant families, only a minority of these businesses are truly flourishing. Many others are just surviving. Additionally, the upper floors of some buildings are either vacant or underutilized although there are few ground floor vacancies. In summary, the current business climate falls far short of the Square's potential.

Over the years, the challenges and problems that must be addressed have been clearly identified by the Square's business owners and surrounding neighbors. They include a mix of land use, zoning, economic development, visual beautification, maintenance, transportation, business permitting, and business organizational concerns which have been documented in detail in previous reports - most recently in the *Union Square Revitalization Study: NSRA Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area Plan (Phase 1 Master Plan)* prepared in March of 2002. A summary of the primary challenges include the following:

- ❑ *Lack of daytime foot traffic to support businesses.* There is a lack of sufficient daytime foot traffic, and therefore demand, to support many of the Square's businesses in a healthy manner. This lack of pedestrian traffic is usually attributed to the lack of sufficient office space in the Square and the resulting lack of office workers who could patronize the Square's businesses and restaurants during the day and at lunch hour. As a result, many restaurants are not open during the day for lunch due to lack of sufficient patronage. Many businesses and some restaurants do not remain open in the evening either.
- ❑ *The retail mix is insufficient to draw a regional market.* The retail mix in the Square consists of largely small local businesses which are not sufficient to draw a larger regional audience. There are, of course, some small business exceptions – including some ethnic food markets, a motorcycle dealership, a furniture store, and others. Also, several large retailers at the far edges of the Square - such as the Market Basket supermarket to the west and the new Target discount retail store to the east near the McGrath Highway - draw patronage from a wider catchment area. For the most part, however, most business patronage in the heart of Union Square is local.
- ❑ *Poor retail mix.* As described earlier, Union Square has a strong restaurant and food market base. However, it has an unusually high percentage of automotive uses and it lacks a strong traditional retail mix component of clothes shops, drug stores, banks, record stores, sporting goods, etc. Certain retail uses specifically desired by the local community that would bring more



Barrister Hall's upper floors are vacant.



A poor retail mix.



Outdoor storage is incongruent with the image of a revitalized Square.



Union Square must compete with nearby commercial centers - many served by rapid transit.

vitality and variety to the Square are also lacking – such as a bookstore, dessert and ice cream shop, and movie theater. Although desired, uses such as a bookstore are difficult to attract since they would require considerable “walk-in” patronage to survive. A small neighborhood movie theatre is another use difficult to attract given the lack of a suitable existing building and the competition of several multi-screen theatres with available parking nearby.

- ❑ *Obsolete industrial uses intermixed with retail uses.* Many older industrial, warehousing, scrap yard, electrical substation, and automotive uses, historically located in industrial areas along the Fitchburg rail line and the Boynton Yards to the southeast of the Square, remain in business and are at times located in close proximity to other retail businesses and residences in the Square. These older industrial and automotive uses are incongruent with the image of a revitalized business district and detract from the Square’s image – particularly in comparison to other nearby competitive business districts such as Inman Square, Central Square, Porter Square and Davis Square.
- ❑ *Competitive disadvantage with other nearby business districts.* Union Square stands at a commercial competitive disadvantage compared to some other nearby commercial districts – such as Davis Square, Porter Square, Central Square, Lechmere/ North Point, and Kendall Square because of the lack of *rapid* transit service - although Union Square is currently served by MBTA buses and has recently gained a new Circumferential Transit (CT) bus route. This disadvantage impacts the ability of Union Square to compete for the retail and restaurant market as well as potential office tenants and businesses that these competing centers can better attract.
- ❑ *Land values / rents are not now sufficient to warrant new construction.* Because of Union’s Square current locational disadvantages, current market rents attainable by commercial building and property owners are not yet sufficient to financially warrant or support new commercial construction or major renovations. For example, rents for industrial space range from \$7 – 11 / sq. ft., and rents for retail space and the second tier office space now available in Union Square range from \$10 - \$17 / sq. ft. These Union Square rents are lower than those of other competing neighborhood squares. However, developers require rents in the \$30s / sq. ft. range to warrant new construction or major renovations. In the future, as commitments to new rapid transit services are made, land values and rent levels are likely to rise, however. When they do, new construction and major renovations can then be financially supported.
- ❑ *Few available and sufficiently sized sites suitable for redevelopment.* Most of Union Square’s buildings are only one or two stories in height -a height and density significantly below what current zoning now allows (and below the scale and height of the three and four story buildings that once occupied the Square at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Buildings are of this lesser scale because most parcels of land are small and insufficient in size or depth to accommodate both denser development *and the necessary parking spaces* they would require. Even if the real



estate market were strong and rents rose to sufficient levels to financially support new modern development to a greater height and density, very few sites would be redeveloped today for this reason. Only if larger parcels can be assembled from smaller adjoining parcels now in multiple ownerships can new construction of significant size be supported.

- ❑ *Poor visual appeal.* Union Square's image and visual appearance - both of its buildings and streetscapes - continue to appear run-down in spite of recent building renovations and storefront improvements which point the way to a revitalized environment. Improved tree plantings, landscaping, renewed sidewalks and improved maintenance are all needed to provide a new attractive setting and public stage for a revitalized Square. Also, approaches to or "gateways" into the Square, particularly from the south along Prospect Street, are unattractive since they travel through industrial, automotive, or outdoor material storage properties along the Fitchburg rail line that are incongruent with the image of a revitalized thriving commercial Square.
- ❑ *Union Square Plaza is not fully utilized to its potential.* The geographic and public open space heart of the Square - Union Square Plaza and the former Union Square Fire Station building located there - is not as vital as it should be. The challenge will be to vitalize and reconfigure the use and programming of the Plaza as well as the uses in the old Fire Station to activate the Plaza and entire surrounding area.
- ❑ *Traffic congestion and perceived parking shortages.* Union Square's well-known traffic congestion, scofflaw violations such as double-parking, and perceived lack of convenient parking diminishes business potential and makes for an unfriendly and even unsafe environment for pedestrians. The total public and private parking supply available today - both on street and off street - is, *on average*, probably sufficient to support the Square's business patronage. (See *Union Square Transportation Plan*, 2002.) However, that available supply is not well distributed throughout the Square and is particularly deficient in the western part of the Square near the Bow Street neighborhood and along Somerville Avenue between the Market Basket and Webster Avenue. Furthermore, many private parking lots which support daytime businesses are not available to the public who wish to patronize the Square's restaurants and pubs in the evening. If Union Square is to grow, arrangements for the shared use of existing parking, an overall increase in parking supply, and the proper distribution of that supply, will all be required. (See 'Walking Distances from Parking Lots' on next page)
- ❑ *Confusing traffic circulation patterns.* Union's Square's street circulation patterns and one-way routings are confusing to visitors and potential patrons and are circuitous. Often, if a motorist mistakenly bypasses the entrance to one of the several public parking lots or is not able to easily turn into one, the one-way street patterns make it difficult to easily recover from that mistake and return without circumnavigating the entire length of the Square. Solutions to many of these circulation issues are recommended in the recently completed *Union Square Transportation Plan*.



The Prospect Street gateway approach to Union Square lacks visual appeal.



Union Square Plaza is not fully utilized.



Union Square's traffic circulation patterns are confusing.

This diagram of reasonable walking distances surrounding public parking lots shows that the western end of the Square is not well served by public parking.



- ❑ **Business community not actively organized.** Union Square's business community, although organized as a BIG (Business Improvement Group), is not sufficiently active in the Square's revitalization efforts. It will need to increase its membership through outreach recruiting efforts and become more active in working with the City in partnership to revitalize the Square.
- ❑ **Licensing and permitting delays.** Many perceive that the process of opening, improving or starting new businesses in the Square requires a difficult and lengthy city permitting, licensing, and approval regimen that could be streamlined and better coordinated by the City to offer a more business-friendly climate. Issues include the availability of liquor licenses, rules concerning outdoor dining areas, and coordinating the permitting approval process among several City departments.
- ❑ **Zoning Adjustments.** Although current zoning regulations regarding allowed densities and heights in the CBD are not a major barrier to development or redevelopment (most properties are now built well below the density and height limits that zoning allows), there exist opportunities to provide better zoning incentives to encourage redevelopment and renovation and make changes to zoning district boundaries to better reflect desired outcomes.



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## Short and Long Term Opportunities:

In spite of the challenges described above, Union Square also offers many opportunities. Some of these opportunities may be realized in the near term future; others may need to await an improvement in market conditions and the firm commitment to new rapid transit services to Union Square. Nevertheless, a clear set of opportunities await and will be the basis for a series of phased recommendations outlined later in this report.

- ❑ *Strong reputation for restaurants and food markets.* Union Square has a strong reputation for ethnic restaurants, food markets and entertainment venues that can be built upon to further strengthen the Square's vitality.
- ❑ *New street circulation patterns and streetscapes.* New street and roadway configurations and circulation patterns for Somerville Avenue, Washington Street, Prospect Street, and Webster Avenue are recommended in the *Union Square Transportation Plan*. These phased traffic and streetscape recommendations promise to improve traffic flows, provide widened sidewalks, allow new tree plantings, and result in a more well-configured Plaza that can become the vital center of the Square. These traffic and beautification improvements will go far to improve the operational characteristics and attractiveness of the Square.
- ❑ *Major redevelopment opportunities at underutilized sites.* There exist new building development opportunities at several key underdeveloped sites identified by this Master Plan throughout the Square to add new office space and housing above new ground floor retail shops on the Square's major street fronts. These sites are located at 1) the Citizens Bank block, 2) the south side of Somerville Avenue between Prospect Street and Webster Avenue, and 3) along Prospect Street. These new developments promise to bring new business employees and residents (and thereby more foot traffic) directly into the Square to increase vitality and support for the Square's existing businesses.

Additionally, several key building renovation sites were identified – including the 1888-era Barrister Hall at 57 Union Square, and the 1880-era Backer Building at 31 Union Square – where significant upper story spaces now remain unleased and unoccupied.

All these new development and renovation opportunities and the new people they will bring will increase transit ridership potential to and from the Square. That increase in ridership potential can significantly bolster the City's case for the need by the MBTA to provide greater rapid transit services to Union Square in the future.

[ The figure which follows illustrates opportunity sites that are likely to be redeveloped over time. Opportunity sites are those defined as having development potential because they are either: 1) of sufficient size to support new development, 2) significantly below allowed development capacity, 3) a disallowed use under current zoning, or 4) for sale or now vacant.]



New street circulation patterns have been recommended by the Union Square Transportation Plan.

*“New development and renovation opportunities and the new people they will bring will increase transit ridership potential to and from the Square. That increase in ridership potential can significantly bolster the City’s case for the need by the MBTA to provide greater rapid transit services to Union Square in the future.”*

Significant site development opportunities.



New CT Buses will serve Union Square as Phase I of the Urban Ring Project.

- ❑ *New rapid transit services to come to Union Square.* As mentioned above, a series of phased rapid transit improvements are anticipated to occur in Union Square in the future. Within the next five years, Phase II of the Urban Ring is scheduled to be implemented. These Phase II improvements include the provision of bus rapid transit (BRT) service which would include a new bus terminal on the east side of Prospect Street just north of the Fitchburg rail line. Also scheduled to be provided within the same time frame is a new commuter rail station on the Fitchburg Line at Prospect Street.

Within ten years, there is also the potential to implement Green Line light rail service to Union Square. The City is now strongly advocating for such service via an extension or spur of the Green Line from the Lechmere Station in East Cambridge to Union Square via the Fitchburg rail right-of-way.

All of these services – BRT, commuter rail, and Green Line light rail service would converge at a multi-modal station on Prospect Street north of the Fitchburg Line right-of-way.

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- ❑ *Reuse of key city properties for new vital uses.* The City, through the process of either declaring surplus or leasing, can offer key unused or underutilized city-owned properties in the Square to private or non-profit users for redevelopment into new active and vital uses that will contribute to the Square's revitalization. These key city properties include the old Union Square Fire Station / SCAT Building on Union Square Plaza, the old Bow Street Police Station, and the Recreation Commission Building on Walnut Street. The method for redevelopment will be determined through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process for sale or lease and redevelopment of the properties. Possible new uses include housing, office space, retail shops, or entertainment and the arts.
  - ❑ *Expanded community use of the Lincoln Park Community School.* The eventual expansion and reconstruction of the Lincoln Park Community School, once state school reconstruction grants are obtained, could also include additional community uses and venues such as meeting rooms and /or recreational spaces.
  - ❑ *New opportunities to "green" the Square.* Several opportunities exist to "green the Square" on what are now very small privately owned parcels of land that cannot be combined with other parcels due to the street system surrounding them. For example, several automotive sales or repair businesses, which are no longer allowed uses in the CBD according to current zoning, are located on some of these very small parcels of land. In the future, if the owners of these businesses decide to relocate and sell, it would be very difficult for other uses (and the necessary parking to support those uses) to be constructed on these parcels because of their small lot sizes without significant zoning relief. Therefore, these sites may eventually become candidates for City purchase and conversion to vest pocket parks since these sites have very little value for other uses. Other significant "greening" opportunities include extensive new street tree plantings along Somerville Avenue, Washington Street, Webster Avenue, and Prospect Street as part of new street designs now being planned.
  - ❑ *New Housing Opportunities.* There is a strong market for new housing, now and in the foreseeable future, throughout the City and in Union Square if suitable sites can be identified or buildings identified for renovation. Such new housing, through Somerville's inclusionary zoning law, would require 12.5% to be affordable.



The old Bow Street Police Station will be renovated for new uses.



New housing on Lake Street was recently completed.



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### III. GOALS & OVERALL REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

#### Goals and Objectives

The following Goals & Objectives were first developed during the preparation of the *Union Square Revitalization Study / Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area Plan (Phase I Master Plan)* in 2000-2002 as a result of a series of public meetings that focused on the Square's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. They were refined and updated during this Phase II Master Plan initiative. These goals remain at the heart of the recommendations suggested in this Master Plan and the *Union Square Transportation Plan* completed in 2002.

*Develop a local economy that emphasizes the tax base, service, residential, shopping and employment needs of the community.*

- ❑ Increase the City's permanent tax base and revenue stream – foremost by means of adding commercial development.
- ❑ Promote the creation of new office space and other types of day time employment opportunities to create increased “foot traffic” to support businesses and restaurants.
- ❑ Support development of additional small scale retail uses that encourage pedestrian traffic.
- ❑ Build upon Union Square's current strengths and maintain Union Square's focus as a restaurant destination.
- ❑ Encourage uses related to arts and entertainment in order to provide additional destinations within the Square and supplement the restaurant focus.
- ❑ Ensure that the City's permitting process is business and resident-friendly while also ensuring that the Square's character is protected and that neighborhoods are preserved.

*Strengthen and market Union Square's image*

- ❑ Determine the market potential for desirable uses within Union Square.
- ❑ Develop a comprehensive marketing package to recruit appropriate development and customers to the Square.
- ❑ Support the neighborhood role of the Union Square business area.
- ❑ Emphasize the historic significance of Union Square.
- ❑ Continue to encourage business-sponsored festivals and events.
- ❑ Involve the arts community in visual improvements.

*Pursue urban design projects that create a unified square, are compatible on a pedestrian scale, define the area as a commercial center, and are aesthetically pleasing.*

- ❑ Improve “gateways” to Union Square.
- ❑ Ensure that sidewalks are sufficiently wide, well lit, clean, safe, comfortable and accessible by the disabled.

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- ❑ Continue to encourage a variety of buildings and styles, but retain the consistency of buildings located at the edge of the sidewalk to define the street wall.
  - ❑ Encourage the use of planters and street trees and other landscaping to soften the environment and provide color and shade.
  - ❑ Ensure maintenance and upkeep of public areas and storefronts.

*Strengthen the role of public places and facilities*

- ❑ Improve Union Square Plaza as a primary focus of activity.
- ❑ Provide benches and seating areas throughout the Square.
- ❑ Improve existing focal points and explore potential for creating new focal points.
- ❑ Ensure that the Public Safety facilities are consistent with both the functional needs of the City and the character of the neighborhood.
- ❑ Develop a reuse plan for the former Bow Street Police Station [now underway].
- ❑ Work with the US Post Office in Union Square to improve parking and traffic flow.

*Maintain an efficient and thorough system of transportation that balances public transportation, private and commercial vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians that is consistent with Union Square's image as a commercial center.*

- ❑ Seek ways to reduce traffic congestion in Union Square.
- ❑ Balance the need to move traffic through the Square efficiently with the need to park and conduct business.
- ❑ Provide bike and pedestrian paths and sidewalks in appropriate areas.
- ❑ Define strategies to improve Union Square's street crossings, pedestrian systems and its sense of coherence.
- ❑ Work with state and regional planning and transportation agencies to develop a plan to meet regional transportation needs that are compatible with the goals for Union Square.
- ❑ Work with the MBTA to establish commuter rail stops to utilize multiple lines that already pass through Union Square.
- ❑ Work with the MBTA to establish a transit stop via the Green Line and the proposed Urban Ring.
- ❑ Work with the MBTA to coordinate bus service within Union Square.

*Develop a comprehensive parking management plan*

- ❑ Involve property owners, business operators, employees and customers in developing a parking plan.
- ❑ Pursue the possibility of building a parking garage.
- ❑ Provide flexible options for business and residential developments that may not be able to provide the required amount of off-street parking spaces due to site constraints.



- ❑ Provide long-term maintenance of public parking areas, including parking fee collection, cleanliness and safety of parking areas.
- ❑ Install directional signage directing motorists to designated parking areas
- ❑ Encourage shared parking arrangements between businesses with complimentary business hours and/or between businesses and residential developments.
- ❑ Ensure that the location of both public and private parking lots are compatible with adjacent building uses, do not disrupt the physical continuity of the street wall, do not disrupt a pedestrian circulation corridor, and are compatible with traffic circulation patterns.

### Overall Revitalization Approach and Guiding Strategies

To meet the Goals and Objectives summarized above, a set of overarching strategies were formulated to guide specific recommendations. These guiding strategies emerged after talking with many business owners and residents of Union Square as well as after making our own observations about the Square's challenges, strengths and opportunities.

- ❑ *Build upon the Square's current strengths.* Union Square has a strong reputation for its ethnic restaurants, food markets, small entertainment spots, and small businesses. This reputation should serve as a foundation to build upon when seeking to attract new and complementary business and retail uses – such as coffee shops, dessert shops, destination restaurants, new small entertainment venues, and a bookstore. New small businesses and start-up businesses should be encouraged. Large chain retailers and auto-oriented drive-up businesses are to be discouraged.
- ❑ *Concentrate new large-scaled development opportunities in the heart of the commercial core and within walking distance of the anticipated new transit station. Avoid dissipating activity.* Sites suitable for significant new development or major redevelopment / renovation should be identified in the heart of the commercial core to create a “critical mass” of activity and pedestrian foot traffic. Major new development should not be dispersed to sites at the periphery of the Square or stretched out along east- west approach corridors which would dissipate activity and foot traffic. All new major development sites should be within an easy walking distance (within 1200 to 1500 feet) from the new multi-modal transit station planned along the Fitchburg rail right-of-way at the intersection of Prospect Street and Webster Avenue intersection. As a corollary, recognize and anticipate that the “center of gravity” of the Square and new development opportunities will gradually shift toward the eastern end of the Square and the Prospect Street corridor as new transit improvements begin to be implemented there.
- ❑ *The Square's revitalization will occur in phases and in synch with market forces and scheduled transit improvements.* New development and new businesses will come to Union Square in phases between now and the next ten years. These improvements will work in synch with market forces, streetscape and street improvements, and, eventually planned



A new book store would be welcomed in Union Square.



New development should be within the 1500 ft. walking distance radius from the proposed transit station.

transit service improvements. For example, a strong market for housing exists today. On the other hand, attainable rents are not yet sufficient to support new office construction. Therefore, the plan for Union Square should suggest phased improvements that are aligned with anticipated market and capital improvement changes in the future.

- ❑ *Union Square will be revitalized by a tri-partite initiative – a partnership between the City, business community, and non-profit sectors.* The revitalization of the Square cannot be achieved by just one sector or the other acting alone. Each sector will need to contribute to the effort. The City, for example, can provide capital improvements, streamline approval processes, and put zoning incentives in place to encourage desired development. The business community must become better organized to encourage cooperative efforts between businesses, help program and sponsor celebratory events, assist in the Square's maintenance, help recruit new businesses, and sponsor media promotional campaigns to advertise the Square's businesses and attractions. The non-profit sector can help provide affordable housing and strengthen arts and cultural activities in the Square. Therefore, a program for specific implementation actions must be included as part of the Master Plan's recommendations that not only outlines a phased timetable, but that also assigns responsibilities for those actions to specific sectors.
- ❑ *Early successes and initiatives must be demonstrated to build momentum and broad-based support to sustain ongoing revitalization efforts over time.* As described above, Union Square will be revitalized in phases over the next ten years. Such phased revitalization will require sustained support over that period of time. However, if wide-spread support for revitalization action is to be initiated and then sustained, early action initiatives will need to be rapidly undertaken and completed to build momentum, confidence and support for ongoing efforts. Examples of such initiatives may include:
  - The proposed conversion of Webster Avenue and Prospect Street from one-way to two-way streets as the first phase of a larger street circulation improvement plan in the Square can be accomplished rather quickly and without significant expenditures.
  - The Prospect Street public parking lot can be expanded into a portion of the recently acquired Kiley Barrel site rather quickly to expand the parking supply.
  - The ground floor tenancies at the city-owned Old Fire Station on Union Square Plaza can be repositioned to include more active uses - such as a restaurant or small shops.
  - Weekend flea, antiques, or farmers' markets can be organized on the expanded Prospect Street public parking lot.
  - The Business Improvement Group (BIG) can better organize and expand its membership to participate more actively in Union Square revitalization initiatives.



The ground floor of the old Fire Station in Union Square should be occupied by new active uses.



Weekend markets can be staged at the expanded Prospect Street public parking lot.

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#### IV. VISION 2012: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNION SQUARE'S FUTURE

By 2012 Union Square will have witnessed many positive changes. It's CBD core will be transformed into a vibrant commercial center served by rapid transit, an expanded mix of retail shops, new offices, and new housing. New business workers and new residents will crowd its sidewalks both during the day and during the evening. Because a new multi-modal transit station will be located along the Prospect Street corridor, the "center of gravity" of the Square will eventually shift or expand toward that transit center as obsolete industrial, storage yard, and automotive sales and repair enterprises there fade. Yet, after all these transformations, the Square will still maintain its current character as a place for restaurants, ethnic food markets, entertainment spots, small businesses, and an ethnically diverse community of nearby residents.

*"Because a new multi-modal transit station will be located along the Prospect Street corridor, the "center of gravity" of the Square will eventually shift or expand toward that transit center."*

By 2012, newly enhanced streets, widened sidewalks, new street circulation patterns, and new parking facilities will all have been constructed. The Square will also be a "greener" place with improved public gathering places. A revitalized Union Square Plaza, new street tree plantings, and gateway parks will all have been built.

These transformations will not take place overnight, however. Many improvements will be phased in over the next decade while other improvement initiatives can begin as soon as tomorrow. Although many real estate redevelopment initiatives will come in phases closely linked to both improving market conditions and the promise of new rapid transit services, other initiatives are already underway today – such as plans for expanding parking at the Prospect Street Parking Lot and the redevelopment of the old Bow Street Police Station. Therefore, a phased set of improvement initiatives and an implementation timetable to achieve those recommended initiatives will be outlined and included as an integral part of this Master Plan.

Ultimately, the Square's transformation will be successfully accomplished only if many parties participate. The City, MBTA, private sector, and non-profit community must all join together as a partnership to achieve the desired outcomes. The Square's business community must better organize itself to contribute to the Square's revitalization. The City must remove as many barriers as possible to desirable business expansion; and, the MBTA must provide new rapid transit services to support the new transit ridership potential that the Square's revitalization will generate. Neither the public sector nor the private sector can do it all alone.

The illustrated Master Plan on the following page provides a vision of what Union Square may look like in 2012.







## Union Square in 2012: The Building Blocks for Revitalization

### □ Urban Design Framework / Sub Districts and Corridors

In imagining the future of Union Square, it is helpful to visualize its underlying geographic structure and then build upon that structure to shape policies for growth, change, and preservation.

Union Square is more than a singular place. It is a combination of the core Central Business District surrounding Union Square Plaza; street approach corridors leading into the Square – including Washington Street, Somerville Avenue, Prospect Street, and Webster Avenue; the narrow industrial and warehousing district along the Fitchburg rail corridor to the south of Prospect Street; the historic Bow Street commercial and residential neighborhood; and “gateway” entrances into the Square. Each subarea and corridor has its own character and contributes differently to the Square. Therefore, each subarea should be addressed on its own terms as a contributor to the Square’s overall vitality.

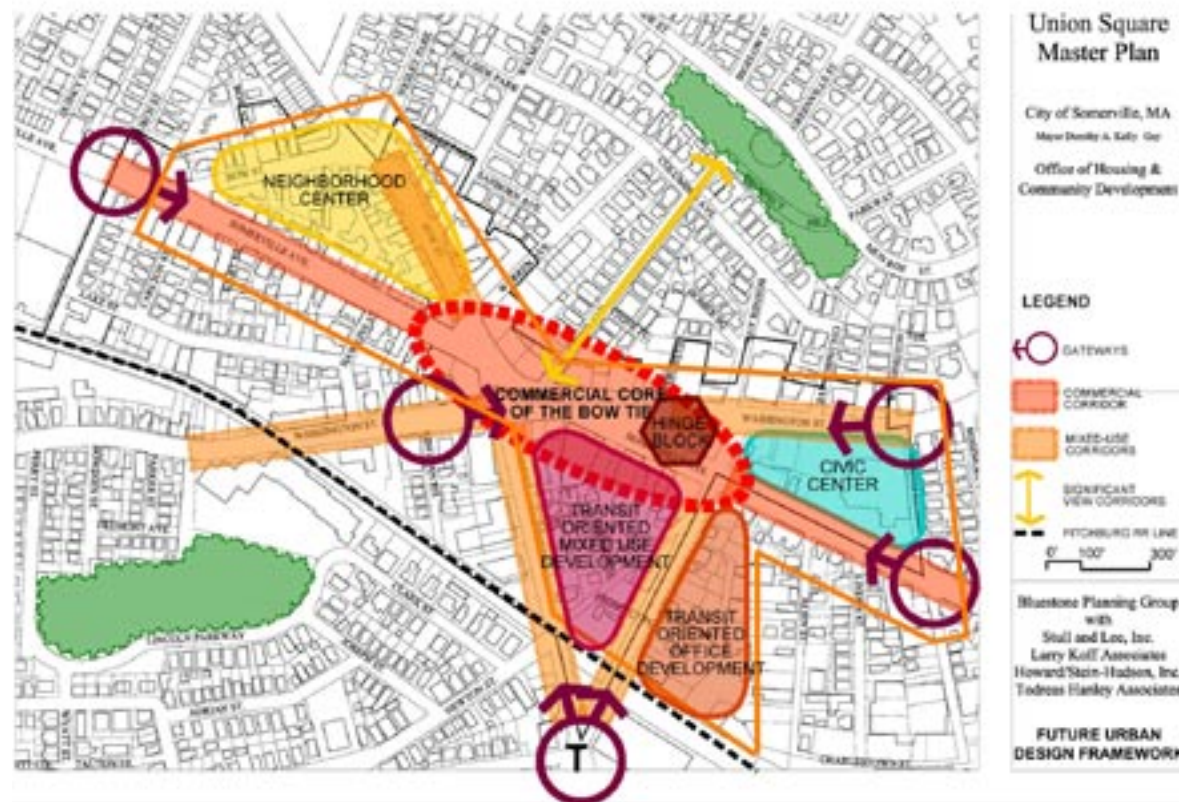


Diagram of Union Square's many existing and future subdistricts and quarters.



The old Fire Station and Union Square Plaza form the “Hinge Block” at the heart of the Square that ties together all the Square’s subdistricts and corridors.



- *The CBD Core and Union Square Plaza Hinge Block* The recommended urban design framework recognizes that the commercial heart of Union Square will remain in the current CBD corridor from Prospect St. to Webster Avenue along Washington Street and Somerville Avenue. Therefore, it is here where new commercial development and increased business activity should be concentrated in the future to maintain a high-density critical mass of activity. Within this CBD core, two major redevelopment sites have been identified – the Citizens Bank Block and the south side of Somerville Avenue between Webster Avenue and Prospect Street. The Union Square Plaza “hinge block” at the heart of the CBD core is the center of gravity and the glue that ties all the Square’s subdistricts and corridors together, and as such, has significant importance. Therefore, the Plaza and the Old Fire Station located there should be strengthened and improved.

- *The Prospect Street Corridor: A new Transit-Oriented Mixed Use Development District* The Prospect Street corridor, now developed with relatively low value land uses such as automotive repair shops, scrap metal yards, and warehouse and shipping businesses, is the gateway to Union Square from Cambridge to the south and reflects the Square’s 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial legacy adjacent to the Fitchburg rail line. That legacy will change, however, as new rapid transit improvements come to Union Square with a new multi-modal transit station focused at the Prospect Street and Webster Avenue intersection. Once transit funding commitments are made, land values in this corridor will rise and pressures will build to redevelop this area with new offices, housing and retail uses. If properly designed, this corridor could become a model “transit-oriented mixed-use development district”. As the corridor redevelops, it will become an integral part of the CBD and will actually cause a shift in the center of gravity of the CBD toward the eastern end of the Square.

- *The Government / Civic Core* The east end of the Square to the east of Prospect Street and north of Somerville Avenue will be anchored by a core of federal and municipal government buildings and services. The existing Union Square US Post Office on Washington Street will remain an anchor and destination. In the future, when funding is identified and secured, the block between the intersection of Somerville Avenue, Washington Street, and Merriam will be redeveloped by the City for its new Public Safety Building – a combination of the Police Station, Union Square Fire Station, Fire Department Headquarters, and Emergency Communications Center.

- *Bow Street Commercial Neighborhood* The historic Bow Street neighborhood, to the north of but not including its Somerville Avenue edge, consists of small shops, markets, restaurants, apartments and historic buildings. It is an intimately and pedestrian-friendly scaled historic district. Its present character and intimacy should be retained and large-scaled new development discouraged here. Instead, modest infill and renovation of existing buildings is recommended. The City’s proposed reuse of the old Bow Street Police Station for new housing, retail or office use is a good example for this district’s future.



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- *Approach Corridors – Somerville Avenue and Washington Street to the east and west of the CBD core* Washington Street and Somerville Avenue are the primary approach corridors leading to the heart of Union Square from the McGrath and O'Brien Highway to the east and from Porter Square and Davis Square to the west. With the exception of the Somerville Avenue block between the Market Basket and Webster Avenue (which is vital, physically intact, and a center of Brazilian immigrant life and entrepreneurship), these blocks host a disparate and wide variety of commercial, housing, automotive, and warehouse uses. These corridors are not recommended or targeted for major redevelopment because so doing may dissipate the “critical mass” of activity needed in the core to revitalize it. However, these corridors should be infilled, where appropriate, and included in plans for new street and streetscape beautification improvements.

- *Gateways* Union Square is first experienced by visitors at gateways or entries into Union Square from three directions – the south, east and west. It is at these arrival points that one realizes he or she is about to enter a “place”, “square”, or commercial center and not just a commercial strip or approach corridor. These gateways or entry points provide a visitor with their first impressions of the Square – for better or worse. Therefore, these gateways need to reflect a positive image.

*Union Square’s southern gateway* from Cambridge is at the intersection of Prospect Street and Webster Avenue. Now marked by low value land uses described above in the “Prospect Street Corridor” section and an electrical power substation, this gateway will be transformed in the future when streets become two-way and new transit services are provided here. Therefore, this intersection must be transformed to reflect its future preeminence.

*Union Square’s western gateway* is at the intersection of Somerville Avenue and Bow Street near the Market Basket. Here, new streetscape improvements will improve this western gateway.

*Union Square’s eastern gateway* is along Washington Street at its intersection with Prospect Street near the Post Office. This gateway interchange is likely to be transformed in the future by new streetscape improvements, major site redevelopment, and a new Somerville Public Safety Building. Some have suggested that Union’s Square’s eastern gateway is actually on Somerville Avenue at the McGrath Highway since this is where much Union Square-bound traffic is generated. (Roadway ramp improvements to provide access from the McGrath Highway to Somerville Avenue may, in fact, be warranted according to suggestions outlined in Somerville’s recent North Point Study; and, the MBTA’s proposed BRT service may, in fact, utilize Somerville Avenue instead of the Fitchburg rail right-of-way – thereby increasing the importance of the Somerville Avenue corridor.) However, this McGrath Highway / Somerville Avenue location offers no sense of entry or arrival to a “place” or “center” and is therefore not Union Square’s actual point of entry.



Various gateway locations need to convey a positive impression.



Union Square’s gateway from the South along Prospect Street needs to be visually and functionally improved.

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## □ Land Use and Scale of Change

Union Square at the turn of the twentieth century abounded with three and four story buildings filled with offices and merchants served by the rapid transit service of that day – street trolleys. Over the following decades, business declined and shifted, trolley service was discontinued, and buildings were reduced in scale to reflect the reduced level of business activity. Today, there is revived hope and new opportunity to restore the dynamism and activity that once thrived in Union Square. That new scale of activity will be reflected in new uses and a new larger scale of development once again that may in fact be a “return to the past” in terms of scale, use and density.

- *Encourage new office development in the Square* Key sites should be identified in the core of Union Square for redevelopment as office uses (including ground floor retail shops) as market conditions and rent levels warrant and allow. As discussed earlier, new offices would bring in a daytime workforce population who could patronize local stores, support a lunch time restaurant trade, increase the ridership potential for transit usage, and generally increase pedestrian foot traffic. Although currently prevailing rent levels for office space in Union Square cannot yet financially support new office construction, as MBTA commitments are made for new transit services in Union Square, land and rent levels are likely to rise sufficiently to warrant such new construction, particularly for properties within a 1200 to 1500 feet walking distance of the new transit station on Prospect Street.

- *Encourage new housing - including a significant affordable component* New housing should be encouraged in the heart of Union Square which would bring a new residential population to support the Square’s businesses and markets as well as provide more “eyes on the street” - thereby providing a greater level of comfort and security to patrons and other visitors to the Square - particularly in the evening. A market for new housing exists today if suitable sites can be identified or assembled.

As new housing is constructed, it will be important to provide and encourage a significant affordable housing component to combat the pressures of gentrification that are certain to build as land values rise and revitalization occurs in the Square. A significant portion of new housing development is currently required to be “affordable” under the city’s inclusionary zoning regulations. Going beyond the inclusionary requirement, the non-profit CDC - the Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) - has been successful in providing entirely affordable housing developments in and near the Square and their endeavors should be further encouraged. Furthermore, as commercial buildings over 30,000 square feet are constructed, the developers of those buildings are required to contribute a “linkage fee” which is then used to support additional affordable housing elsewhere.

As new residential developments are constructed along any major commercial street or avenue in the Square, retail spaces should be required on the ground floor of these residential buildings to help vitalize the Square’s commercial and pedestrian life. [See following “bullet” item.]



The new Linden Street housing development was recently completed to the immediate East of the Square.

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- *Require that retail, service and restaurant uses be provided on the ground floors of new development along the major street corridors* As new development begins to occur, ground floor retail uses should be required to help vitalize the Square's main streets – Somerville Avenue, Washington Street, and Prospect Street.

- *Gradually reduce the presence of nonconforming industrial, automotive, and warehouse uses in Union Square.* Many of these uses, now located throughout the Square but particularly around the Prospect Street corridor, are no longer allowed as permitted uses under current CBD zoning and are considered “nonconforming”. However, *existing* nonconforming business uses are allowed to legally remain and operate under the legal concept of “grandfathered” uses. Over time, as these existing nonconforming business uses either close or voluntarily relocate, their sites should be redeveloped with new conforming office, retail, and housing uses supportive of Union Square's revitalization goals, or, public spaces when their lots are too small to support other viable uses.

- *Increase the density and the scale of the Square* As parcels of land become available and are assembled into larger sites to support new development, new office and housing projects will likely approach three and four stories in height and achieve a density of almost 2.0 FAR. This new scale and density of development will exceed the prevailing heights of today's buildings - which are typically only one or two stories in height -but will reflect the historical scale of buildings which once predominated in Union Square. Visually, three and four story buildings aligning the Square's main streets of Somerville Avenue, Washington Street, and Prospect Street provide pleasing street corridor and street wall proportions.

#### ❑ **Potential Zoning Changes to Achieve Desired Uses and Scale of Development**

Zoning exists to allow and encourage desired development and prohibit unwelcomed outcomes. To reflect new use changes, scale changes, redevelopment opportunities, and the goal of creating a more pedestrian friendly environment in Union Square that are desired and likely to occur in the next decade, the Zoning Ordinance should be amended to allow and provide incentives to achieve those changes.

In most ways, the Square's existing CBD zoning district's use and dimensional provisions are supportive of the type of new development that is desired and are not restrictive to new development. The currently allowed height of 4 stories / 50 feet and the currently allowed density of Floor Area Ratio (FAR) 2.0 are appropriate in size and scale for the Square's future and allow significant potential for growth and redevelopment since most of the Square's existing buildings are built to a much lower height and density than what is currently allowed. Therefore, these current density and height provisions are not the limiting factor to new development. Two other existing zoning provisions *do* particularly stand out as potentially prohibitive to new development, however. They are the provision that establishes required on site parking requirements, and the provision that



Many of Union Square's older apartment buildings include retail uses on the ground floor.



Union Square in 1905 when many buildings were three and four stories in height.

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establishes the number of dwelling units allowed per site area. These two provisions, in particular, need to be reconsidered.

In regard to parking requirements, it will often be difficult for new development of a 4 story height and FAR 2.0 density to fit on many of the Square's small sites because the building "footprint" itself may consume most if not all of the site – thereby making it difficult if not impossible to dimensionally fit the required on-site parking as well – particularly on surface parking lots. To achieve a building with an FAR of 2.0, *structured parking* will probably be required at the very least, if site dimensional depth allows. [If parking can be built underground, the dimensional "fit" problem may be overcome. However, the high cost to construct underground parking may be either difficult to afford given likely rent levels achievable in the future, or, difficult and costly to construct in areas of high water tables.] It is therefore probably this parking requirement provision, combined with the Square's small lot sizes, that have limited more intensive development in the past, even if the market had been supportive.

One way to alleviate this restrictive burden is to consider reducing the current minimum parking requirement to a lower ratio. However, the minimum parking ratios now required by zoning are *not* excessive given market demand expectations in a location not now served by rapid transit service. Therefore, it may be difficult to reduce parking requirements further unless and until improved transit service is provided.

Fortunately, the Zoning Ordinance currently allows slight reductions in parking requirements by other means - if evidence of a shared parking arrangement with other nearby parking lot owners can be provided, or, if the property is within close proximity to a public parking lot with reasonable capacity. Another key way to overcome this restriction is to assemble land into larger parcel sizes that are sufficiently large to dimensionally accommodate new denser development and structured parking facilities as well.

The current requirement that limits the number of dwelling units allowed per site area is also potentially restrictive to achieving housing densities that can approach FAR 2.0 and heights of four stories with reasonable floor plan size. Therefore, consideration should be given to increasing the number of allowed dwelling units per site area. Current zoning provisions require a minimum of 1000 square feet of lot area per one dwelling unit. Therefore, for an imaginary 10,000 square foot lot with an allowed density of FAR 2.0, ten dwelling units could be built with a total of 20,000 square feet. Therefore, each dwelling unit would be, on average, 2000 square feet in size. By contrast however, if the minimum lot area requirement per dwelling unit were reduced to 600 square feet, then approximately 17 dwelling units could be constructed on the same site at an average size of 1,175 square feet each – a much more appropriate size for urban living and for achieving affordable units.



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### *Suggested Zoning Changes*

Listed below are some potential zoning revisions for the City's consideration. The City may wish to create *new* zoning districts for Union Square rather than simply amend the provisions of the *existing* Central Business District (CBD) or Neighborhood Business (NB) zoning districts. This should be considered since the CBD and NB zoning districts govern *other* commercial centers throughout Somerville as well as Union Square. Therefore, amending these districts to reflect more appropriate provisions for Union Square would also change those provisions for other commercial centers as well where such amendments may not be appropriate. Therefore, new districts such as CBD-2 and NB-2 should be considered and applied exclusively to Union Square.

- *Extend the CBD District to include the east side of Prospect Street.* In the future, major redevelopment is likely to occur in the Prospect Street corridor as transit commitments for a new multi-modal station at Prospect Street and Webster Avenue are confirmed. Therefore, a zoning district boundary change should be considered to extend the CBD district to the eastern side of Prospect Street. This change from the area's current BA / Business A zone would allow certain desired uses, such as restaurants, to be built as-of-right rather than by Special Permit. It would also encourage the more pedestrian-friendly environment desired (i.e. buildings located close to the street line) than the BA District now encourages.

- *Remove much of the Bow Street Area from the CBD District and place it into the NB / Neighborhood Business District zoning category.* Remove much of the Bow Street area (except the portion along Somerville Avenue and the area on Bow St. south and east of Warren) from the CBD District and place it into the NB / Neighborhood Business District to preserve the historic Bow Street area's smaller scale. The NB district allows a maximum height of 3 floors and 40 feet rather than four floors and 50 feet allowed in the CBD. An FAR 2.0 should be allowed as in the CBD.

- *Eliminate fast order food establishments with drive-through windows and drive-through provisions for other business establishments as allowed uses in the CBD district.* In order to encourage a pedestrian-friendly environment in the CBD, fast order food establishments should be prohibited as an allowed use. Drive-through lanes and facilities for other types of businesses should be prohibited as well.

- *Establish a 15,000 square foot cap on retail uses in the CBD district to discourage large chain stores.* Require that retail uses in the CBD not exceed 15,000 square feet in size. This limitation will discourage large chain retailers from assembling land in Union Square for large stores not in character with Union Square's small business atmosphere.

- *Add "Artists Work Spaces" as an allowed use category in the CBD and NB district.* To encourage working artists to locate in the Square to bring liveliness, "buzz", and creative energy to the district, add an "Artists Work Space" use category to the Allowed Use Table in the Zoning Ordinance and make such use allowable by Special Permit in Union Square or elsewhere



Proposed Bow Street Neighborhood Business District



Fast food outlets should be prohibited in the Square.



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in the City. “Artists Work Space” may be defined as a commercial space located on any floor of a commercial, office, or industrial building where artists may create and fabricate a work of art. Criteria for granting a Special Permit may include assurances that : 1) there are adequate safety, fire protection, and ventilation requirements for the proposed endeavor, 2) noise will not disturb or neighbors of the building, 3) flammable materials will not be improperly stored on the premise, and 4) there is adequate service access for the artistic endeavor seeking permit approval. Additionally, it should be made clear that the Artists Work Space cannot be used for residential purposes.

- *Eliminate required front yard setback requirements in the CBD to establish a “build-to line”*

In order to encourage a pedestrian friendly environment along street sidewalk edges and provide a strong continuous street wall in the CBD district, require buildings to build directly to the back -of -sidewalk line. Exceptions for flexibility can be allowed for minor setbacks for a certain portion of the length of the façade to allow for building façade articulations, bow window extensions, and small outdoor patios or outdoor dining areas.



New buildings along major commercial streets should include ground floor retail spaces.

- *Require that buildings in the CBD along major commercial streets are designed with ground floor spaces able to accommodate retail uses.* In order to encourage a pedestrian friendly environment and active street life, retail and/or restaurant uses should be required on the ground floor of office, commercial or residential mixed-use buildings. Should a developer claim hardship due to lack of market support for such uses, then such ground floor space should nevertheless be designed and constructed with glazed storefront systems and adequate floor-to-floor heights able to host retail uses in the future even if those ground floor spaces are not initially occupied for that purpose. Residential uses should be prohibited on the ground floor in all circumstances.

- *Consider increasing the maximum allowed height to 55 feet.* To allow modern four story buildings with office space (with floor-to floor heights of 12 to 13 feet) above and ground floor retail space with 15 to 16 foot floor-to-floor heights, the current height cap of 50 feet should be amended to 55 feet.

- *Reduce the minimum lot area per dwelling unit requirement in the CBD.* Reduce the minimum lot area per dwelling unit requirement from 1000 square feet to 600 square feet in the CBD to encourage more dwelling units per development lot and to encourage reasonable dwelling unit sizes that are appropriate for urban living and which can be kept “affordable”.

- *Establish a Transit Overlay District within 1200 to 1500 feet of the proposed new Prospect Street Transit Station to reduce parking requirements.* Once transit commitments are confirmed, establish a Transit Overlay District within a 1200 to 1500 foot walking distance radius of the transit station. Within this radius, reduce minimum required parking ratios below those currently required for entertainment uses specifically. (Existing zoning already provides for across-the-board reduced parking requirements near transit stations.) Consider establishing *maximum* parking ratios as well within the Overlay Zone.

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- *Explore the feasibility of establishing an off-street public parking facilities fund* Explore the feasibility of establishing an off-street public parking facilities fund to be levied on new development at sites where the minimum required parking for the proposed development cannot be reasonably accommodated either due to the lot's restricted size or configuration or due to excessive costs. Such a fund should be established only if candidate site(s) are identified where such an off-street parking facility might be constructed. In exchange for contribution to such fund, the minimum parking requirements for the site can be reduced.

#### ❑ **Private Redevelopment Site Opportunities: Three Key Sites**

In order to provide the opportunity to increase office space and housing in the Square as well as new street-level retail shops, a number of sites - both large and small and both public and private - that are likely to be redeveloped were identified using a variety of criteria. Of these many potential redevelopment sites, three privately-owned sites were identified as having the most significant redevelopment potential. These three specific sites were identified because: 1) they have sufficient dimensional depth to allow new development *and* the structured parking required to support that development, 2) they are now significantly underdeveloped compared to what current zoning allows (These sites are largely occupied by one story buildings and parking lots whereas zoning allows four-story buildings.), and 3) they are within reasonable walking distance of the planned new transit station site on Prospect Street. In each instance, these sites are now held in multiple ownership. However, cooperative site assembly of adjacent parcels appears to be possible in all instances. The intention of identifying these sites is to illustrate the redevelopment potential available to the sites' owners should they choose to avail themselves of that opportunity.



Many of the likely public and private redevelopment and renovation sites.



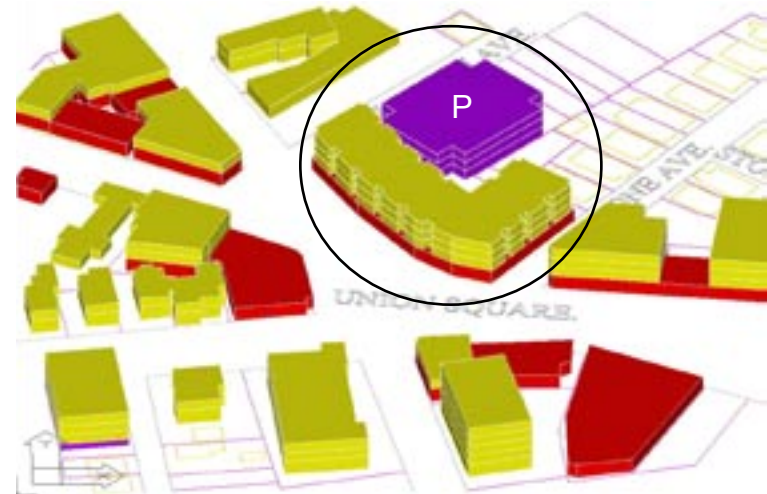
The three key redevelopment sites.

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- *Citizens Bank Block / New Public Parking Site* The block on Bow Street between Stone and Warren is now occupied by three one and two story buildings including the Citizens Bank, the Reliable Food Market, a third commercial structure hosting several businesses, and a large private parking lot behind them. If redeveloped, there is the potential to develop either three floors of office space or housing above a ground floor occupied by retail uses. There is also sufficient space at the rear to construct a parking structure to support this increased development.

If this redevelopment opportunity is to be fully realized, at least two of the three property owners may need to cooperate and join their properties. However, if this cooperation should not occur, the owners of the Citizens Bank property could advance on their own to develop their property.

Because public parking is lacking in this section of Union Square, there is an opportunity to provide new public parking at this site by allocating one level of the new private parking structure to public parking. Zoning incentives may need to be offered to the site's owners to achieve this privately sponsored public parking deck – such as the City providing a density bonus, relaxation of the current “site area per dwelling unit” requirement, and or a relaxation of the required parking count if shared use of parking spaces can be demonstrated. Public parking revenue sharing may also contribute to the viability of achieving these public parking spaces.

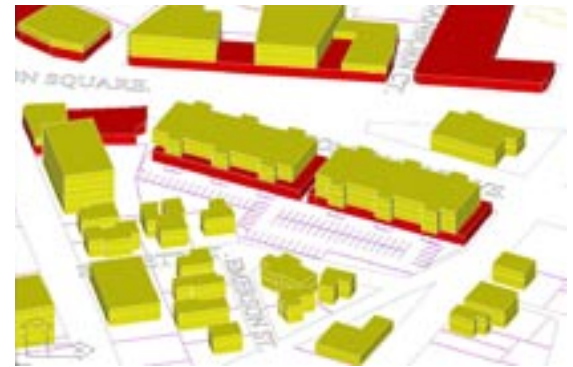




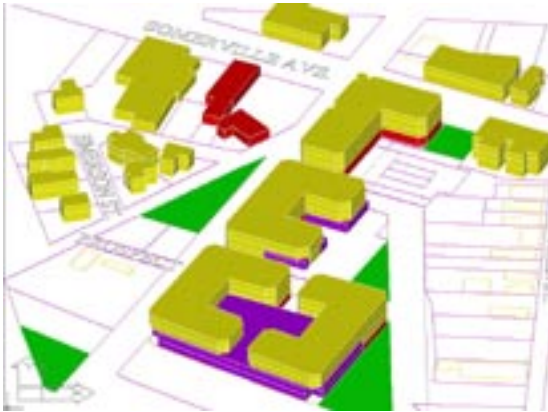
- *South Side of Somerville Avenue (between Prospect Street and Webster Avenue)*

The south side of Somerville Avenue between Prospect Street and Webster Avenue is now occupied almost exclusively by one story buildings that have considerable site depth behind them. Some current owners and tenants include the Dunkin' Donuts, and Riverside Kawasaki Motorcycle. If this block were redeveloped, there is the potential to construct four story buildings: three floors of offices or housing units above a ground floor of retail spaces.

These sites are now held in multiple ownership. However, cooperative assembly or purchase of adjacent parcels may be possible to achieve. If full site assembly is not realized, however, it may still be possible to achieve the same result by constructing two adjacent buildings – each with different ownership.



View looking East on Somerville Avenue toward the old Fire Station, with new development on the right



▪ *Prospect Street Corridor / MBTA Multi-Modal Transit Station / and Transit-Oriented Development District* The entire east side of Prospect St. - from the Cambridge line on the south to Somerville Avenue on the north - is now occupied by light industrial uses, scrap metal yards, and several key municipally-owned properties including the Prospect Street public parking lot and the recently-acquired Kiley Barrel site. Almost all these properties are under-developed compared to their allowed potential and are reflective of the Square's past industrial era. The Kiley Barrel site is now being analyzed for contaminants. Other sites are also likely to contain contaminants as well. Therefore, soil remediation efforts will probably be required to allow these sites to be redeveloped for new uses.

The block between the rail line and Somerville Avenue is proposed as the locus of the MBTA's proposed new multi-modal rapid transit station that will eventually accommodate local buses, BRT service, a commuter rail station, and potentially, a Green Line light rail stop. The MBTA will need to acquire, at a minimum, easements or rights-of way through these properties to accommodate bus and vehicular drop-off circulation. Site assembly may be required as well. Because transit facilities and circulation will become an integral part of this site, close coordination and a partnership between the City, the MBTA, and the site's private owners or redeveloper will be required to create a coherent plan that works for all parties. The MBTA, together with the City's Redevelopment Authority, may also act as the agent, to assemble the parcels necessary to achieve the successful redevelopment of the site.

Based on the site's configuration and an allowance for the space required to accommodate transit facilities and circulation, new development in this corridor could accommodate up to four separate four story buildings with either office space and/or housing above a level of ground floor retail shops. Structured parking will be required to accommodate parking demand and the parking spaces required by zoning.



New transit oriented development along Prospect Street at the new transit station.



New Union Square Commuter Rail Station at Prospect Street and Webster Avenue.



Possible bus circulation routes for the BRT Bus Station in Phase II of the Urban Ring.



Because structured parking will be required, most likely on the lower levels of new buildings, a primary design criterion will be to require that retail shops be located on the ground floor of all buildings along Somerville Avenue and along Prospect Street to help enliven these street edges and physically mask the parking levels located on the buildings' lower levels. Most desirably, parking would be located underground. However, it is not yet certain that the rents that this new development could attain could financially support the high cost of excavating and constructing underground parking. Therefore, it is best to assume, at this time, that structured parking will be built below active building floors, but above ground. Fortunately, because of the site's combined natural slope down toward the rail line and the elevated height of the Prospect Street viaduct over that rail line, parking below the Prospect Street viaduct can be hidden but may not need to be excavated.

A floor level of public parking should also be constructed as part of the private redevelopment of this site to supplement public parking in the Square and replace the public parking spaces that will be lost at the Prospect Street lot and eventually at the Post Office / Somerville Avenue lot as a result of redevelopment of these properties. As discussed for the Citizens Bank site, zoning incentives and public parking revenue sharing may be needed to encourage the site's private redevelopers to provide these dedicated public parking spaces.

▪ *Summary Redevelopment Program : Three Key Sites*

The redevelopment program for the three key redevelopment sites identified above are summarized below:

SUMMARY REDEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: THREE KEY SITES					
SITE	OFFICE	or	HOUSING	RETAIL	PARKING REQ'D.*
Citizens Bank Block	60,000 sf	or	60,000 sf / 64 DUs	15,000 sf	135-180
Somerville Ave. South Side	95,000 sf	or	72,000 sf / 64 DUs	14,000 sf	105-185
Prospect Street Corridor	225,000 sf	or	160,000 sf /130 DUs	35,000 sf	260-450
Total	380,000 sf	or	292,000 sf /258 DUs	64,000 sf	500-815

*\*Parking as required by zoning. Low number in range assumes housing + ground floor retail; high number assumes office space + ground floor retail*



Barrister Hall.



Backer Building.



Revitalized old Union Square Fire Station

## □ Key Building Renovation Opportunities

- *Barrister Hall* Barrister Hall (57 Union Square), also known as the Stone Building, on the corner of Washington Street and Stone Avenue, is a four story building which reflects the historic scale of older Union Square buildings that once predominated in the Square. It includes retail shops on its ground floor and offices on the second floor. The two upper floors are unrented and unoccupied and include an unused meeting hall space. The building's exterior brick façade was covered in the 1950s with a metal panel curtain-wall cladding. The building does not have an elevator.

Barrister Hall represents an opportunity for redevelopment as an office building if considerable investments were made to provide modern facilities and an elevator. Hopefully, the 1950's era metal façade could be removed as well, thereby revealing the building's original brick exterior. Current rent attainable in Union Square would not support the cost of such major renovations today. However, over time, as land values and rent levels rise in Union Square, major renovations could then be supported. If fully rented, Barrister Hall could provide up to 20,000 square feet of new office space in Union Square.

- *Backer Building* The Backer Building (31-34 Union Square), also known as the Eberle Building, is a handsome three story brick building that includes Elegant Furniture on its ground floor and offices on the second floor. The third floor is a vacant space that once housed a dance hall and which is now used for storage. The building has no elevator. The Backer Building represents an opportunity to restore the vacant upper floor for new uses -perhaps a community meeting room or community theater space. It could also be used for office space. As is the case with Barrister Hall, current rent levels attainable in Union Square would not support the cost of major renovations today. However, over time, as land values and rent levels rise in Union Square, major renovations could then be supported.

## □ City Property Reuse Initiatives as Catalysts for Revitalization

The City of Somerville is in a unique position in that it owns several buildings in Union Square which are no longer used for municipal purposes but which are prime for redevelopment. This provides an opportunity to redevelop these buildings for new uses that could help revitalize the Square and serve as catalysts for additional private investment.

- *Old Union Square Fire Station / SCAT Building* The old Union Square Fire Station in the heart of the Square on the Plaza is owned by the City and leased to several organizations - including SCAT / Somerville Cable Access TV on the ground floor, and MAPS / Massachusetts Association of Portuguese Speakers on the upper floor. Each tenant has a short-term lease. Both SCAT and MAPS are well respected community organizations. However, their functions could be carried out equally as well in a less prominent location.

It is therefore recommended that the City seek new lessees for the building that require a visible and prominent location and that could contribute new vitality to the Square – particularly the tenant(s) of the ground floor. Such new tenants may include a destination restaurant and small flower shop, for instance. In warm weather months, the restaurant could provide an outdoor dining area on Union Square Plaza. The upper floor could continue to be rented to community, arts, or cultural organizations and perhaps an affiliated art gallery.

- **Old Bow Street Police Station Reuse** The old Bow Street Police Station, built in 1874 and located at 50 Bow Street, is a handsome brick building owned by the City and is now vacant. The building is within the City's Bow Street Historic District and its redevelopment is subject to preservation restrictions. For the past two years the City, together with a Reuse Committee, has studied reuse options – including housing, office space and retail shops. Each and all of these uses would help significantly revitalize the Bow Street neighborhood and help catalyze other improvements in the Square – particularly at its western edge. When restored to productive service, the old Bow Street Police Station will add 15,000 square feet of new occupied space to the Square and will likely restore this building to the City's tax rolls.

The Board of Aldermen has declared the building surplus, allowing the City to solicit redevelopment proposals for its sale or lease. Proposals will be evaluated based upon a predetermined set of criteria developed with input from the community.

- **Expanded Public Safety Building** The City has conducted an alternative sites investigation and feasibility study to expand and combine the City's Police Department, central Fire Station and EMS services on the triangular block bounded by Washington Street, Somerville Avenue, and Merriam Street where the existing Public Safety Building is now located. Preliminary plans were prepared to indicate the amount of space needed and the relationship of Police and Fire Department spaces to each other. This expanded facility would require several land takings in order to accomplish. The total estimated cost of the proposed Public Safety Building is \$31 million, excluding site acquisition and remediation costs, furnishings, fixtures, equipment, soft costs, and contingency.

At present, funding to build this facility is not available. Therefore, it may be some time before this facility is constructed. When it is built, however, it is suggested that a small retail component be included on the ground floor at the Washington Street / Somerville Avenue / Prospect Street intersection to help enliven this important corner in Union Square. Security issues with this type of use mix would need to be addressed, however.

- **Walnut Street Recreation Commission Building Reuse** The City's Recreation Department is currently located in a handsome brick building on Walnut Street – a residential street near the heart of Union Square. The building is not ideal for its current use due to a lack of parking, barriers to accessibility, and a poor configuration of space for recreational programming. The Recreation



One of several reuse concepts for the old Bow Street Police Station.



Expanded Public Safety Building plan.



Existing Public Safety Building.

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Commission Building (excluding the basement level space, which is deeded to the Walnut Street Center, Inc.) can be sold or leased by the City for new uses – such as housing. A Feasibility Reuse Study will need to be undertaken to examine the building's best reuse options.

- *Lincoln Park Community School Expansion* Somerville is developing final plans to reconstruct the Lincoln Park Community School and has been selected to receive a state school construction reimbursement grant to fund the reconstruction. As part of the reconstruction, community spaces are planned, including an auditorium available for public meetings and classroom space that can be utilized after hours for adult education courses.

- *Allen Street Tot Lot / Head Start Center* The City has successfully arranged a land swap of private and City-owned parcels on opposite sides of Allen Street that will allow construction of a new city tot lot to support the Allen Street neighborhood and the construction of a new Head Start Center to be sponsored by CAAS.

#### ❑ **Economic, Business Development, and Marketing Initiatives**

A series of initiatives can be undertaken to immediately improve the economic vitality of Union Square. Financial assistance, through targeted improvement and training programs, can be provided by the City – such as the City's Storefront Improvement Program. In the long-run, major capital public investments now anticipated in the Square by the City and State will also catalyze long-term growth. However, the majority of economic improvement initiatives that can be undertaken today are best initiated by the business community itself.

- *Tenant Recruitment / A Better Retail Mix* The retail tenant mix at Union Square is currently diverse, although the Square's primary reputation to outsiders is largely based upon its restaurants, ethnic food markets, and pubs. As a result, some of the sit-down restaurants and bar/pubs in the Square draw customers from beyond the local neighborhood; a few of the larger stores such as Riverside Kawasaki Motor Bikes, Stanhope Framers, the Elegant Furniture store and the Reliable Market even draw customers from the wider Boston region; however, most of the smaller stores and services draw customers only from the immediate neighborhood. And so, although the Square's retail diversity and strengths are clear to local residents, that diversity is not readily apparent to customers in other parts of Somerville, Cambridge, or Medford beyond the Square's reputation for restaurant and food markets.

Some of Union Square residents have voiced interest in an improved mix of commercial uses in the Square that encourages more vitality and street activity and that builds upon the Square's current strengths – its restaurants, food markets, and small entertainment venues such as the Tir Na Nog pub. New complimentary uses most often requested include the addition of a cinema, bookstore, and dessert café. Already, a need expressed earlier for a coffee house is beginning to be fulfilled by the recent opening of the SA Coffee House on Union Square Plaza. More restaurants and



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entertainment venues would also be welcomed and help create a greater critical mass of activity.

While all these desired uses would enhance the current tenant mix, market support for these uses in Union Square needs to be increased. A coordinated advertising campaign by the Union Square business community, media publicity, new storefront façade improvements, an enhancement of the Square's visual appearance and maintenance, and improved directional signage to existing parking lots would all help to increase that support immediately. Eventually, as traffic circulation is improved, new parking sites added, and key sites in the Square are assembled and redeveloped for new office tenants, an increased daytime population of office workers will supply the foot traffic needed to further support new retail activity.

Of all the uses that there has been an expressed desire for, a small neighborhood cinema is perhaps most problematic to achieve since the industry itself has been declining with an oversupply of inventory (movie theatres). Union Square is surrounded by multi-screen theatres at Harvard Square, Kendall Square, and Assembly Square. Additionally, no existing building in Union Square is readily adaptable to such use. (The Davis Square Theater was built upon an existing theater venue.)

Other independent retail uses, such as a bookstore, need either anchor stores, office developments, or increased foot traffic. Without one or more of these components, new public transportation, or dedicated parking, landlords will most likely have to aggressively lure this type of tenant by providing financial incentives and low rents.

To help attract a more desired mix, active recruitment of such businesses and retailers is needed to match tentatively interested businesses with information about available spaces for lease and advise on applying for city permits and approvals. The City, with its property information base, working with the Business Improvement Group (BIG) as an information clearing house and tenant recruitment office, could help proactively assist in attracting the desired mix. A slightly more aggressive strategy would be to establish a clearinghouse and leasing office in the Square. At one centralized location in the Square, all interested landlords could list their vacant properties. A part-time staff person would organize the information, advertise the space, and assist in the leasing, permitting, and approvals process. An architect on retainer could assist new tenants lay out space and design signs. This effort could be a cooperative venture between the City and BIG.

- *Start-Ups, Artist Work Spaces, and Incubator Spaces* Small industrial spaces and office spaces in and around Union Square are used today, in small measure, by small start-up businesses, working writers and artists, and non-profit organizations because rents are inexpensive. These users bring vitality to the Square. There is strong regional demand for such spaces where rents are inexpensive. Today, vacant upper story spaces in Union Square offered at low rents would be attractive to such tenants. As the Square redevelops over the next decade, upward pressures on rents will build and suitably affordable spaces will become less available.

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However, many small properties, confined on small parcels, will have no room to grow or have sufficient financial incentive to undertake major renovations, even as rents rise around them. Therefore, in all likelihood, some space will remain that offer lower rents.

- *Marketing and Promotional Campaign and Customer-Aid Materials*

**Business Community Better Organizes to Become Proactive** The business community in Union Square is organized as the Union Square BIG, the Business Improvement Group. The BIG is an arm of the Somerville Chamber of Commerce. The BIG can play a more vital role in the Square's revitalization by vigorously recruiting and organizing the Square's many small business and property owners to coordinate their efforts to improve the Square. For example, they could work to help maintain the cleanliness of the Square, broker shared parking arrangements between private parking lot owners and businesses without sufficient parking, encourage employees to park in more remote locations, help sponsor regular entertainment or outdoor market events, serve as an information clearinghouse to match up businesses wishing to come to Union Square with spaces available to rent, and attempt to encourage better coordination of business hours among the Square's various businesses and restaurants.



Weekend markets could be sponsored as a promotional event to attract business patronage to the Square.

**Media Advertising Campaign** The BIG should organize the Square's business community to help fund a promotional campaign for the Square as a whole to advertise it as the "up and coming place to be". Collectively funded, an effective ad campaign could be undertaken in print media as supplementary fliers in local newspapers. (Recently, through an individual business effort, there has been increased positive publicity in print publications and on TV about that business and Union Square as a whole.)

**Union Square Parking and Business Location Map** The BIG could also, for about \$10,000, have ad companies specializing in such endeavors prepare and print a map of Union Square indicating business locations and all public parking locations. Such maps would be available to patrons at the front counters of all participating businesses. Such map campaigns have been successfully undertaken in Central Square and Harvard Square in Cambridge.



Spice of Life Festival.

**Promotional Events and Weekend Markets** The BIG should consider sponsoring regular promotional events to attract patronage and visitation to the Square. The Spice of Life Festival occurs annually but requires rededicated recruitment of participants and organizations and a concentration of activity into a smaller space to create a lively atmosphere. The BIG should also consider sponsoring weekly or monthly entertainment events on Union Square Plaza, and, on weekends, help sponsor antique, flea, or a farmers market at the expanded Prospect Street public parking lot – all with the intent of increasing business patronage and raising the reputation and profile of Union Square as a place to visit and find lively activity. These sponsorships should be initiated on a trial basis. However, sufficient time should be allowed for these events to build.

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- *Coordination and Extension of Business Hours: Creating A Critical Mass of Activity* At present, some businesses and restaurants are not open during lunch hours while others are not open for the dinner hour and evenings. Clearly these businesses do not believe there is sufficient trade to maintain longer hours. However, the result is that patrons visiting the Square often find closed businesses and storefronts at all hours of the day – thereby reducing the critical mass of activity that would otherwise attract patrons to the Square in the first place. Therefore, the BIG should organize a discussion among business owners to better coordinate and extend their business hours to create the needed critical mass of activity. Such coordination of hours is a fundamental practice of all shopping malls. This effort could be initiated on an experimental or trial basis. If it proves successful, the experiment can be extended permanently. At a minimum, an attempt to extend and coordinate hours should be tried for one or two nights a week.

- *Increase Applications for City's Storefront Improvement Program* The City offers to assist business or property owners to upgrade their storefronts with a 50% rebate on storefront improvements up to \$40,000 per project. Two very successful projects in Union Square have recently been completed – *The Independent* and the *Eberle Building*. The city is expanding its outreach program to announce this program to potential applicants by publishing an informational brochure and broadcasting the program's availability on local cable access TV, in addition to direct outreach to businesses.

- *Advising on Good Business Practices: Micro Business Assistance Grants* Somerville has recently formed a partnership with Career Source / Employment Resources, Inc. (ERI) to create a two-and-a-half year program aimed at helping employed low-income individuals to save money and build assets while gaining a financial education. The saved money can then be used to start or expand a small business. Union Square has been selected as a target area for this program. Under this partnership program, for each dollar saved by the individuals, the participant will receive two dollars. Participants could have up to \$6,000 when they are eligible to make a qualified withdrawal.

#### ❑ **Transportation: Streets and the Pedestrian Environment**

A variety of new street and streetscape improvements are planned for Union Square in the years to come. Taken together, these improvements will improve auto circulation, improve pedestrian spaces and pedestrian safety, and beautify the Square. The City completed its *Union Square Transportation Plan* in 2002, which outlines several alternatives for new street circulation, bus stop locations, and on-street parking options. This report recommends a preferred alternative from among the options outlined in the *Transportation Plan*.

- *Union Square Roadway and Circulation Improvements* The City's *Union Square Transportation Plan* outlines several alternatives to reconfigure traffic circulation in the Square and significantly improve pedestrian sidewalk spaces, pedestrian safety, on-street parking locations,

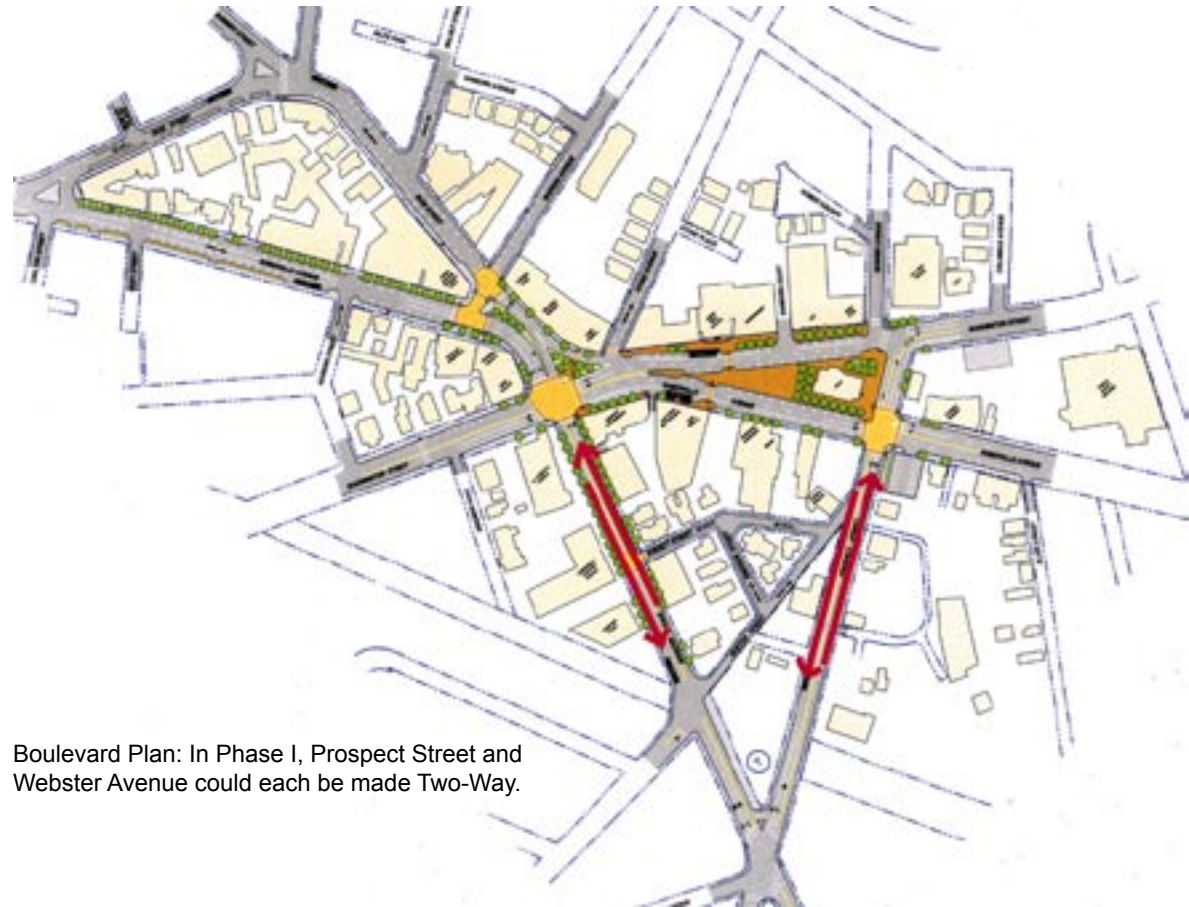


New roadway improvements will relieve today's traffic congestion and improve pedestrian safety.

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and bus stop locations. For a detailed description of these options, the *Union Square Transportation Plan* should be referenced.

This Master Plan recommends the “Boulevard Plan” as the preferred alternative. The Boulevard Plan, illustrated below, suggests that Somerville Avenue and Washington Street each be reconfigured as one-way streets between Prospect St. and Webster Ave. This will require that Washington Street, which now dead-ends into the Washington Street public parking lot, be extended to Bow Street as a one-way through street. The 90 degree angle public parking spaces in the Washington Street lot would be realigned as curbside parallel parking spaces along the newly extended Washington Street. Additionally, the Boulevard Plan recommends that Prospect Street and Webster Avenue each be made into two-way streets.



Boulevard Plan: In Phase I, Prospect Street and Webster Avenue could each be made Two-Way.



In order to avoid unnecessary roadway construction disruption to the Square all at one time, the City is implementing the *Transportation Plan* in phases. The first phase of converting Prospect Street and Webster Avenue into two-ways streets is currently in the design phase. This step-by-step phased approach will also allow the City to determine whether such incremental circulation changes are, in fact, improving traffic conditions in the Square. If improvements do result, then the second phase of reopening Washington Street to traffic could be implemented. To achieve these improvements, there will be some changes to roadway geometry at the center of the Square.

The Boulevard Plan offers many potential pedestrian and bicycle-access improvements to the Square as well as traffic circulation benefits. Because Somerville Avenue and Washington Street would each be made into one-way streets, Somerville Avenue between Prospect and Webster could actually be narrowed in width, thereby allowing widened sidewalks and bicycle lanes. This would also increase pedestrian safety by narrowing the street crossing distance for pedestrians and allowing pedestrians to watch for oncoming traffic from only one direction. Additionally, curbside parallel parking spaces could be added to the north side of Somerville Avenue, thereby providing slightly more total parking than with the existing configuration. Parallel parking also will serve as both a traffic calming measure by slowing traffic speeds through this length of Somerville Avenue and as a safety buffer between pedestrians and moving traffic.

The reconstruction of Washington Street, proposed to be opened up and extended through to the Somerville Avenue / Bow Street intersection, will allow sidewalk widths to be expanded in front of the stores and restaurants now adjacent to the public parking lot, thereby allowing additional room for pedestrians and outdoor dining areas. Union Square Plaza itself will be reconfigured to create a more unified and consolidated space in front of the old Union Square Fire Station in comparison to the disunified series of underutilized spaces there now.

- *Somerville Avenue West* The MHD/ Massachusetts Highway Department plans to reconstruct Somerville Avenue from Porter Square to Union Square in order to provide utility improvements. As this utility and roadway reconstruction occurs, the street's sidewalks and street tree plantings could be improved as well by the City with a combination of CDBG and MHD funds. City plans indicate new sidewalks with a decorative paving edge, street trees, pedestrian crossings, street furniture and benches, bike racks, pedestrian-scale lighting, and curb extensions at pedestrian crossings in order to narrow the width of street that pedestrians must cross.

#### ❑ **Transportation: Parking**

- *Curbside Parking* As described immediately above, the reconfiguration of streets through Union Square will allow the addition of new curbside parallel parking along *both sides* of Somerville Ave. between Prospect and Webster, and will convert the Washington Street parking lot spaces to curbside parallel parking spaces along the newly reopened segment of Washington Street.



Boulevard Plan: In Phase II, Washington Street and Somerville Avenue would be made into One-Way Streets.



New sidewalks and tree plantings will be constructed on Somerville Avenue just West of the Square.

▪ *Public Parking Structures and Lots* At present, there are three public parking lots in Union Square – the Prospect Street Lot (9 public spaces and 8 business permit only spaces), the Washington Street / Union Square Plaza Lot (42 spaces), and the Washington Street Lot across from the Post Office – which are all concentrated in the eastern end of Union Square. As identified in the *Transportation Plan*, there is a *perceived* shortage of public parking spaces (on-street and off-street) throughout Union Square, although an actual shortage, on average, may not exist. However, because these parking spaces are unevenly distributed throughout the Square, there may be an *actual* shortage of spaces at the western end of the Square and the Bow Street area.

To remedy this deficiency and allow for development expansion in the future, this Master Plan recommends that two new public parking garages be constructed in Union Square. Since the City cannot afford to fund such improvements at this time, it is recommended that public parking be created as part of a public /private partnership with private property redevelopers. Additionally, the City now plans to expand the Prospect Street Lot into a portion of the adjacent SRA-acquired Kiley Barrel site property as an interim measure until new development occurs there.



The existing small Prospect Street parking lot will be expanded to the East into the recently acquired Kiley Barrel site.

#### *Expanded Prospect Street Public Parking Lot / Kiley Barrel Site*

The City is in the process of selecting a designer for the expansion of the Prospect Street Public Parking Lot site for additional public parking spaces. The selected designer will also provide services to undertake soil remediation efforts on the expansion site as well. Consideration should also be given to include in the required construction specifications a provision for the supply of electricity and water for outdoor flea or farmers markets that may be occasionally held there.

#### *Proposed Citizens Bank Block Public Parking Deck*

As part of the recommended redevelopment of the Citizens Bank Block for new housing, retail and/or office space, a new privately constructed parking structure will be required to support this redevelopment project. We recommend that an additional parking level be provided as a part of this parking structure to accommodate paid public parking.

Incentives could be offered to a private redeveloper to provide such parking, including: zoning density bonuses, reductions in private parking spaces required by zoning in exchange for the provision of public spaces, dedication of the public parking revenue stream directly to the private redeveloper, and or agreements formulated to allow public parking in a certain portion of spaces during the evening when such spaces are not needed by daytime occupants, such as office tenants.

#### *Proposed Prospect Street Corridor Public Parking Deck*

As part of the redevelopment of the Prospect Street Corridor properties described earlier for office, housing and retail uses, a new privately constructed parking structure will be required to support this redevelopment project. We recommend that an additional parking level be provided as part of this parking structure to accommodate paid public parking. Such public parking will be

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needed to replace two public parking lots - the Prospect Street Lot and the Washington Street Lot across from the Post Office - that will be lost when the sites they are now on are redeveloped. As described above, incentives could be offered private redevelopers to provide such public parking spaces. At the Prospect Street Corridor site, the City has additional leverage or bargaining power with private redevelopers since the City owns several parcels of land within this corridor that could be strategically important to private redevelopers wishing to assemble land to construct new offices and/or housing.

- *Shared Parking Arrangements between Private Parking Lot Owners* Currently, many private parking lots are underutilized or not used at all during the evening because they serve businesses with daytime operating hours. They therefore offer opportunities to increase the evening parking supply. We recommend that the City and BIG assist in developing cooperative agreements between these private parking lot owners and businesses and restaurants with evening operating hours to use these parking spaces at night. Several private commercial lots that may be prime candidates for such agreements include the Citizens Bank lots and the Goodyear lot.

In a similar manner, the City, on behalf of nearby residential neighborhoods, could help expedite a discussion about the use of commercial parking spaces at night (i.e. 6:30 PM until 7:00 AM) for resident parking spaces. One simple business mechanism to implement this proposal would be for commercial lot owners to rent their spaces over night to residents for a modest rental fee. This rental arrangement is a traditional business transaction commonly understood and recognized by commercial property liability insurers – whom are often cited as impediments to this type of arrangement.

If existing businesses wishing to expand or new businesses come to the Square and cannot provide sufficient parking on their own property due to its limited size, their on-site parking requirements as required by zoning could be reduced if they can show evidence of such permanent shared parking arrangements. (Current zoning allows for such required parking reductions if shared parking arrangements can be demonstrated.)

- *New Metered Spaces on Bow Street* New metered spaces should be installed on the commercial part of Bow Street between Summer Street and Somerville Avenue to encourage a more rapid turnover of spaces for retail customers. Currently these unmetered spaces are used for long-term parking largely by employees and bus commuters.

- *Private Parking Lot Improvements – Sanborn Court* The owners and abutters of Sanborn Court (a private way and parking lot) off of Union Square Plaza have suggested re-striping parking spaces for greater efficiency and generally improving the condition of Sanborn Court to create additional parking spaces there and improve loading and deliveries.

- **Increase Parking Control and Traffic Enforcement Against Parking Scofflaw Violators**

Double-parking is commonly found throughout Union Square, thereby slowing traffic and creating unsafe conditions. Traffic enforcement should be rigorously enforced for such violators.

- **Transportation: TDM / Transportation Demand Management Initiatives**

As redevelopment occurs in Union Square over the next several years, it will be important to monitor traffic and the mode share by automobile. Low parking ratios and/or maximum parking requirements in the zoning ordinance will help reduce development-generated traffic. The City should require periodic surveys of employers in Union Square to determine the actual percentage of employees arriving by car and by other means to help evaluate the need for additional TDM measures. (For a more complete discussion of possible TDM measures, refer to the *Union Square Transportation Plan*.)

- **Transportation: Bicycle Access**

Encouraging local access by bicycle could be a contributing component of the Plan. Union Square's streets are now congested and relatively unsafe for bicyclists. As Union Square's roadways are reconfigured and new streets designed, however, it may prove beneficial to provide bicycle lanes or wide outside curb lanes for comfortable bicycle travel. Bicycle racks should be required to be installed at all new and redeveloped projects and the new transit station along with provisions for long-term (indoor) bicycle storage for employees and residents. As the nature of Union Square changes over time from a pass-through locale to one that is more destination-oriented, pedestrian and bicycle access will likely become a more common way to get to the Square.

- **Transportation: Transit**

There are ambitious plans by the MBTA, with the full support and advocacy of the City, to construct a variety of transit improvements in Union Square including: 1) Bus Rapid Transit / BRT service as part of Phase II of the proposed Urban Ring Circumferential Line, 2) possible rail service near, but not in Union Square as part of Phase III of the Urban Ring, 3) a new commuter rail station, and 4) an extension of the Green Line through or nearby Union Square. These several initiatives would coalesce at a new multi-modal transit station at the intersection of Prospect St. and Webster Ave. to allow ease of transfer between the various transit modes. This new station would also catalyze real estate reinvestment in the vicinity that could be shaped into a planned transit-oriented development district.

Many of Union Square's citizens and the Union Square business community have witnessed the transformation of Davis Square over recent years and have attributed much of that transformation to the Red Line Station which opened there two decades ago. In like manner, they foresee transit



Prospect Street corridor will become a new multi-modal transit center.



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improvements as necessary and critical to Union Square's rebound. Although there is little doubt that the planned transit improvements for Union Square will prove enormously beneficial, it is also critical to remember that, even when fully funded, many of these projects will not be completed for another five to fifteen years. Therefore, although it will be important to plan for and insure that these transit initiatives are built and designed in a manner fully supportive of revitalization efforts, it is equally important not to stake Union Square's revitalization strategies on these future transit initiatives alone.

- *MBTA Urban Ring Circumferential Transit Service* The MBTA, as part of its regional Urban Ring circumferential transit initiative, has suggested various transit improvements in Union Square in its recently completed Major Investment Study (MIS) for the proposed Urban Ring project. These improvements will be phased in over a period of years.

*Phase 1* of the Urban Ring, which is now being implemented, would add one new crosstown (CT) bus route and upgrade an existing crosstown bus route now serving Union Square. Headways on the CT buses are anticipated to be 10 minutes in peak hours and twenty minutes midday, nights and weekends. Existing local buses would continue to run and serve as feeders to the CT buses.

In *Phase 2*, scheduled to be implemented perhaps as early as 2006 but no later than 2011, the MBTA hopes to initiate improved Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service into Union Square. This service will complement the Phase 1 CT bus routes with one new BRT3 bus route running from Wellington to Kendall via Union Square. The BRT should run along the Fitchburg right of way to Union Square as stated in the Major Investment Study for the project. A transit right-of-way or easement for this connection will be required by the MBTA through the Prospect Iron & Steel site, M&S Bennett Services site and/or the Kiley Barrel site.

In *Phase 3*, portions of the region's Circumferential Transit service are to be converted from BRT bus service to rail or light rail transit modes sometime after 2011. Conversion to rail service is *not* now indicated for Union Square, however. The BRT 3 route put into operation in Phase 2 would continue to operate in Phase 3. To warrant consideration of Phase 3 rail service, evidence of significantly increased ridership and boarding counts in Union Square will have to be provided to the MBTA as well as a favorable cost / benefit analysis.

- *MBTA New Union Square Commuter Rail Station Stop on Fitchburg Main Line* Concurrent with the new Phase 2 Urban Ring Service, the MBTA has committed to providing two new commuter rail station stops in Somerville - one in Gilman Square on the Lowell commuter rail line and one in Union Square on the Fitchburg Line. The Union Square station platform is anticipated to be located between the Prospect Street and Webster Avenue overpasses where commuter trains stopped in earlier years. The BRT3 bus route would serve both new commuter rail stops in Somerville. As part of this new commuter rail station design, new platforms, stairways and elevators up to the street will be required.





Route map of Green Line Extension to Union Square, then northward in tunnel under Prospect Hill



Route map of Green Line Spur to Union Square on Fitchburg Branch rail corridor.

To insure that new commuter rail service is provided sooner rather than later, it has been suggested that commuter rail service to Somerville and Union Square be provided as a *mitigation measure replacement service* for the planned temporary shutdown of Green Line service to Lechmere Station that will result from the reconstruction of the elevated Green Line tracks in the North Station area of Boston. Such replacement service should be in operation *before* Green Line service is temporarily shut down. Temporary busing is expected to begin in spring 2004 and the new “Super Platform” at North Station is scheduled to open in fall 2005.

- **MBTA Green Line Extension or Spur to Union Square** In a separate initiative, as a transit mitigation commitment for the Central Artery project, the MBTA has promised to extend the Green Line from Lechmere Station in Cambridge to Medford via Somerville. The MBTA's currently proposed mandated project on this extension will travel on an alignment just several blocks to the east of Union Square along the Lowell Branch rail right-of-way to its terminus at Medford Hillside near Tufts University, but will not directly serve Union Square. The City of Somerville has strongly expressed its wishes to see direct Green Line service provided to Union Square instead.

The alignment option preferred by the City is to extend the Green Line to Union Square via the Fitchburg Branch. Then, the Green Line would turn northward in a new tunnel through Prospect Hill to eventually connect up to its intended destination in Medford Hillside.

Alternatively, the Green Line could be extended to Union Square and/or Porter Square and beyond on the existing Fitchburg Branch right-of-way without significant right-of-way expense and without turning north in a tunnel section through Prospect Hill. A third alternative is to continue with the MBTA's preferred Lowell Branch alignment with light rail or other type of service to Medford Hillside with spur Green Line service to Union Square via the Fitchburg Branch.

The City remains committed to working with the MBTA to consider these alternative alignments or spurs, which will bring Green Line service directly to the Square. Since it has been over fifteen years since the MBTA last studied the feasibility and alignment route of the Green Line Extension into Somerville, it is now timely that the MBTA begin a feasibility study, alignment study, and Environmental Impact Statement to assess whether its formerly preferred alignment via the Lowell Branch remains valid, particularly in light of new development and the resulting increase in transit ridership potential that is planned for Union Square.

The MBTA has also identified the extension of the Blue Line to Medford as a low priority project on its Program for Mass Transportation (PMT). This alternative could also meet the needs of the community in a similar way as the Green Line extension and should be explored further.

- **Bus Stop Locations & Shelters** Due to the roadway circulation changes suggested in the *Union Square Transportation Plan*, recommendations were made in that Plan to relocate or consolidate bus stops to serve the various bus lines now serving Union Square. The *Transportation*

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*Plan* should be referenced to review the recommended locations.

It was also suggested during the course of this Master Plan that the MBTA provide bus shelters at as many bus stop locations as possible. Therefore, the City should petition the MBTA for such shelters. [It should be noted that the MBTA provides a standardized plexiglass bus shelter design to all localities. If the City wishes a bus shelter design more compatible with its own planned streetscape and street furniture improvements that will be provided along Somerville Avenue West and other eventual streetscape improvements in the Square, then the City will probably have to fund these alternative bus shelters itself.]

#### ❑ **Transportation: New Transit Ridership Potential**

Once one or more *rapid* transit services become available to Union Square, several key sites around the Square within walking distance of the new multi-modal transit station are likely to be redeveloped to higher, better, and more intensive uses – for office, housing and retail stores. These three key redevelopment sites were described earlier in this report. Based on the development potential of these sites described earlier, estimates were made of the potential new transit ridership they would each generate.

These estimates were tested for sensitivity to various parking ratio constraint assumptions. Only “reasonable” parking ratios and assumed attainable transit mode share were assumed. It is clear that the existing parking ratios set for Union Square are aggressive and would require a significant percent of trips to come by transit, walking, and bicycle. It is *not* recommended that parking ratios be changed to further reduce the availability of parking because doing so would force unrealistic transit mode shares.



Revitalized Union Square Plaza and redeveloped Old Fire Station.

Transit Ridership Estimates Generated by Key New Development Sites			
Development Site	Parking Ratio (spaces/1000 sf)	Transit Mode Share	Est. Daily Ridership
<b>Somerville Ave. – South side</b>			
Office Scenario	1.75 / 1000 sf	45%	630
Housing Scenario 1	1.0 / DU	55%	310
Housing Scenario 2	1.5 / DU	40%	225
<b>Citizens Bank Block</b>			
Office Scenario	1.75 / 1000 sf	50%	490
Housing Scenario 1	1.0 / DU	55%	255
Housing Scenario 2	1.5 / DU	45%	200
<b>Prospect St. Corridor</b>			
Office Scenario	1.75 / 1000 sf	40%	1,107
Housing Scenario 1	1.0 / DU	50%	500
Housing Scenario 2	1.5 / DU	35%	350

#### ❑ Visual Improvements & Beautification Initiatives

There are a variety of visual improvements and beautification efforts that can be undertaken in Union Square to enhance the Square's visual appeal and attractiveness. They include small and large efforts and some can be initiated by the public sector while others should be undertaken privately.

- *Union Square Plaza Redesign [ Public Initiative]* As part of the recommended "Boulevard Plan" roadway improvement recommendation, Union Square Plaza will be reshaped and reconstructed. This necessary reconstruction offers an opportunity to redesign the Plaza to be a central public gathering place in the Square and the Square's visual and symbolic focus. The new Plaza should include a significant amount of seating and tree plantings. It should also provide space for outdoor dining space adjacent to the redeveloped old Union Square Fire Station.

The Plaza should also include a clear area for performance space that is provided electrical outlets. Some have suggested that a performance stage be constructed. However, a stage is probably



not necessary and would have to be disassembled and stored in winter months. Additionally, the Plaza should have a central visual focus to give the Plaza and Square as a whole a new landmark and symbolic identity. A Union Square clock tower has been suggested as well as a large ornate glass-enclosed bus shelter that could also serve as a gazebo or sheltered seating pavilion. Either of these two ideas, or others that are suggested, should involve the Somerville artists' community in its design.

- *Restored Union Square Fire Station Cupola [ Public / Private Initiative]* The City should seek to rebuild the cupola that once rose above the old Union Square Fire Station.
- *Storefront Improvement Program [ Public / Private Initiative ]* One of the most successful initiatives that has been undertaken in Union Square and elsewhere throughout the City is the City's Storefront Improvement Program. The City should not only continue to make this program available to store owners but actively solicit new applications from building owners and store owners.
- *New Streetscapes, Street Furniture and Lighting [ Public Initiative]* As discussed under Transportation Recommendations, the City plans to construct new streetscapes and street furniture throughout Union Square once funding is obtained. These improvements will significantly improve the appearance of Union Square and help "green the square" with new tree plantings.
- *Bow Street Traffic Island Tree Replanting or Landscaping [ Public Initiative]* In a more modest effort than the one described immediately above, new landscaping, funded by the MWRA, should be replanted on the island along Bow Street where trees were previously removed by the MWRA for necessary utility work there. The MWRA is also providing funding for tree replacements elsewhere.
- *New Public Parking Lot Landscaping – Prospect St. Lot [ Public Initiative]* As part of the City's planned expansion of the Prospect Street Public Parking Lot into the adjacent Kiley Barrel site, the City should include a well landscaped perimeter along Prospect St. and Somerville Ave. to visually screen the cars and provide a well-maintained green edge.
- *Prospect / Webster Gateway Plaza or Park [ Public initiative]* As part of the Prospect Street Corridor redevelopment and the MBTA's plans to construct a new commuter rail and multi-modal transit station at the Prospect St. / Webster Ave. intersection, it is recommended that a new Prospect/Webster Gateway park or plaza be constructed at the site of the Webster Auto Sales property. This property may be needed by the MBTA to provide stair and elevator access to the new commuter rail platforms that will be built on the Fitchburg Branch adjacent to and below the Webster Auto Sales site.



Revitalized Plaza, new cupola, and new clock tower landmark.



Storefront improvements, such as that accomplished by the Independent Restaurant, should be emulated throughout the Square.



Prospect Street corridor park and plaza improvements.



NStar substation site can be improved with landscaped screening as below, or a mural wall.



- *Prospect Street Park / Plaza [ Public initiative]* Also as part of the Prospect Street Corridor redevelopment plan, portions of the west side of Prospect Street could be converted to a park or plaza to help “green” this end of Union Square. Some of the parcels here are small and oddly shaped, so it is unlikely that they will be able to be redeveloped for new commercial uses (except a small commercial parking lot) unless a zoning variance is obtained to waive current parking requirements. This offers the opportunity to create a park or plaza at this site since other uses are not likely to prove viable.

- *NStar Electric Substation Site Improvements and Screening [ Private Initiative]* The NStar electrical substation on Prospect Street is unattractive and diminishes the image of Union Square - particularly as visitors enter the Square from Cambridge to the south. The City, together with the Webster Avenue Advisory Committee and Groundworks, has initiated a discussion with NStar to have them visually screen their perimeter - either with landscaping or artistic solutions such as murals.

- *Private Parking Lot Landscape Buffer Screening [ Private Initiative]* The visual appearance of a number of private parking lots could be significantly improved if their street edge perimeter(s) were buffered with thickly-planted hedges. Prime candidates for such improvements include the Dunkin’ Donuts lot on Prospect St. and Somerville Ave. and the Market Basket lot at the western edge of Union Square.

#### ❑ **Permits, Licensing and City Approval Process Reconsiderations**

In order to encourage more business openings and business expansion, the City’s licensing, approval, and permitting process should be examined to speed approval times, expedite the coordination of approvals and permits required from various departments, and in general make the process more user friendly.

- *Provide Consumer Handbook Explaining the Licensing and Zoning Approval Process* The City plans to issue a consumer handbook to advise business applicants about the permit and approval process necessary to open or expand businesses in the City. This Handbook should prove highly beneficial in dispelling the mystery and complexity of those approvals.

- *Review City-wide Policy for Distribution of Available Liquor Licenses* The City should review its distribution of available liquor licenses, particularly the “all alcohol” licenses. These licenses could be used as incentives for targeted economic development areas such as Union Square – which is a dining and entertainment center. Perhaps one reserved “all alcohol” license could be issued to a destination restaurant anchor that might be willing to occupy the ground floor of the old Union Square Fire Station, thereby sparking Union Square Plaza’s revitalization in the heart of the Square.

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- *Review Local Ordinance Governing the Serving of Liquor on Outdoor Public Areas*

At present, the City, through its own local ordinance (Article 1, Section 9-1), interprets State restrictions or conditions on the drinking or serving of beer, wine or alcoholic beverages at outdoor dining areas on public land or sidewalks very conservatively so as to all but prohibit the serving of alcohol at sidewalk cafes or restaurants. This impedes the flourishing of outdoor cafes and restaurant dining areas in Union Square and throughout the City. Other cities, such as Boston, interpret State requirements more liberally so as to allow the drinking and serving of alcoholic beverages within outdoor “patio” areas, even on public sidewalks as long as Boston’s DPW agrees to allow public seating within the sidewalk right-of-way. Somerville may wish to amend its ordinance and adopt the “Boston model” to allow more outdoor dining opportunities in Union Square.

- *Zoning Permit Streamlining Initiatives* The Special Permit process in Somerville is like that of many urban communities. Homeowners and developers must undergo a lengthy and complex appeals process in order to obtain a special permit or variance. There are opportunities to improve both the zoning ordinance and the process.

Second, the City lacks permit tracking software. The adoption of this software and the networking of the various departments would facilitate permit tracking.

Third, certain minor appeals could go directly to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) and not involve an additional public hearing before the Planning Board, or, could be granted directly by a staff member serving as a zoning administrator. This would speed the appeal process, reduce the backlog of cases, and grant greater satisfaction to small property owners frustrated by current delays. Possible appeals that could be streamlined include changes to non-conforming structures that don’t trigger dimensional violations, minor changes in one non-conforming use to another, and appeals for a small number of parking spaces. These minor cases do not require substantive input of the Planning Board and the issues can be adequately addressed directly by the Board of Appeals or an appointed representative acting as zoning administrator. This zoning administrator could also reduce the time that an applicant would be required to wait in order to receive a denial letter with Inspectional Services. As an alternative to the up to 30 day wait for a denial letter, which is the first step in the planning and zoning Board of Appeals process, the applicant could be made aware by the zoning administrator of their need for a submission for zoning relief and could be scheduled for a meeting and begin the process earlier.

- ❑ **Marketing and Promotion**

*[See Marketing and Promotional Campaign narrative in the “Economic, Business Development and Marketing Initiatives recommendations section of this Master Plan.]*



As noted on the previous page, private parking lots should be visually screened by attractive landscaped edges.





#### □ Wayfinding and Branding Identity

A number of measures can be undertaken to provide a better coherent image and identity to the Square as well as to assist people to find their way in the Square and to key places such as public parking lots. Much of this can be accomplished through signage, street furniture design, identity logos, and coordination of graphics, typeface style, and colors for all these measures to provide a unified image. The City and Union Square's business community has already implemented some key initiatives such as the installation of the "Union Square Lively Historic Crossroads" banners installed several years ago.

- *Identity Logo* An identity logo, such as developed for the "Lively Historic Crossroads" banner, should be consistently adopted for all graphics or signage associated with the Square.
- *Public Parking Lot Signage* Public parking lot signage of consistent design should be developed and installed at the entries to all public parking lots.
- *"Gateway" Signage* New signage conveying the message of "Welcome to Union Square" should be placed at all gateway entrances to the Square and should be consistent in color, typeface and graphics with all Union Square signage. Locations should be at: 1) the intersection of Prospect Street and Webster Avenue at the Square's southern gateway, 2) on Somerville Avenue travelling westbound at its intersection with Prospect Street at the Square's eastern gateway, and 3) on the traffic island at the intersection of Somerville Avenue eastbound, Bow Street, and Church Street at the Square's western gateway.



A coordinated system of public signage should be designed for Union Square as has been done in other communities.



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## V. GETTING TO 2012: PHASED RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

### Introduction: Phased Recommendations and Actions

The various recommendations, initiatives, and redevelopment opportunities identified in the previous chapter will not all be implemented immediately. Instead, they will be carried out incrementally and in phases over the next decade by the City, the State, the Union Square business community and the non-profit sector.

Some initiatives have already begun while many others - which are primarily organizational, administrative, and regulatory in nature - can begin as soon as tomorrow. Still others must be synchronized to coincide with the cycles of an improving real estate market and rising land values, the schedule for various planned MBTA transit improvements, the fiscal and bonding capabilities of the City and the Commonwealth to fund public initiatives, and the speed by which the Union Square business community and the City can organize to take the initiative on various fronts. Needless to say, no one has a crystal ball that can predict the future or the timing of that future with absolute certainty. Nevertheless, educated guesses can be made as to when certain initiatives can be undertaken based upon current information.

Therefore, an *Implementation Action Table* has been prepared which: 1) specifies specific action that can be undertaken; 2) identifies the time frame in which these actions are likely to be implemented, and, 3) identifies the responsible parties to undertake each of the actions.

The various initiatives in the *Implementation Action Table* have been divided into nine categories:

- ❑ LU: Land Use and Zoning
- ❑ ED: Economic Development
- ❑ T-SP: Transportation: Streets and the Pedestrian Environment
- ❑ T-P: Transportation: Parking
- ❑ T-T: Transportation: Transit
- ❑ CI: Capital Improvements (for public buildings)
- ❑ V: Visual Appearance and Beautification Initiatives
- ❑ P: Permits, Licensing and City Approval Processes
- ❑ MPO: Marketing, Promotion and Organization

The implementation schedule in the *Implementation Action Table* has been organized into four phases:

- ❑ Year 1: Early Action Initiatives
- ❑ Years 1-5: Action Initiatives
- ❑ Years 6-10: Action Initiatives, and
- ❑ Ten Years and Beyond: Action Initiatives

# UNION SQUARE MASTER PLAN: IMPLEMENTATION ACTION TABLE

## Year 1: Early Action Initiatives

Code	Action	Responsible Party: Public Sector	Responsible Party: Private/ Non-Profit Sector	Funding Source or other Actions Required
<b>LU</b>	<b>Land Use &amp; Zoning</b>			
LU- 1	City votes to declare surplus and then advertises for redevelopment of vacant <i>Bow Street Police Station</i>	Board of Aldermen / OHCD		Private funding
<b>ED</b>	<b>Economic Development</b>			
ED- 1	City proactively promotes existing "Storefront Improvement Program" to business and property owners by publishing brochure. City facilitates its use by amending program to allow owners to select their own designers.	OHCD	Participating business and property owners	Storefront Improvement Program / CDBG funds; Private matching funds
ED- 2	City works with ERI and business owners to train small business owners in good business and marketing practices.	OHCD	ERI / Employment Resources, Inc., and small business owners.	Micro Business Assistance Grant Program
ED- 3	Business community organizes to prepare promotional print media campaign for Union Square		BIG	Dues collection and fund raising
ED- 4	Business community organizes to prepare Union Square <i>map</i> locating businesses and parking lots for distribution to customers		BIG	Dues collection and fund raising
ED- 5	Businesses discuss coordination of business hours to create "critical mass" of activity to draw patronage into Square.		BIG	

<b>T-SP</b>	<b>Transportation: Streets &amp; Pedestrian Environment</b>			
T-SP- 1	Design and public process initiated for conversion of Prospect St. and Webster Ave. into two-way streets	Traffic & Parking / OHCD		CDBG funds and Traffic & Parking staff time
T-SP- 2	City completes designs for Somerville Ave. [west of Webster Ave.]	OHCD / DPW		CDBG Funds
<b>T-P</b>	<b>Transportation: Parking</b>			
T-P- 1	Expand Prospect St. Public Parking Lot onto portion of recently acquired Kiley Barrel site. Advertise for design firms to design lot.	OHCD/ Somerville Redevelopment Authority / Traffic & Parking		CDBG Funds
T-P- 2	City recalibrates Bow St. parking meters to encourage faster turnovers for business customers	Traffic & Parking		Traffic & Parking staff time
T-P- 3	City, with the assistance of BIG, encourages discussions between key commercial property owners with private parking lots to allow shared use of lots between day / evening users [e.g. day users such as Goodyear Tire and Citizens Bank and various restaurants with primarily evening patronage]	Traffic & Parking / OHCD	BIG; Commercial property owners with private lots	City can reduce on-site parking requirements for property owners with evidence of shared parking agreements.
T-P- 4	Business owners encourage their employees to park in remote locations along commercial streets so as to not utilize on-street or off-street parking spaces that would best be reserved for customers.		BIG / business owners	
T-P- 5	Sanborn Court alley (private way) next to Independent Restaurant ( 75 Union Square) is cleaned up and re-stripped to provide more parking and better service.		Businesses and property owners abutting Sanborn Court	Private funds
T-P- 6	City works with business community to more strictly but fairly enforce parking regulations	Traffic & Parking	BIG	

T-T Transportation: Transit				
T-T- 1	City works with MBTA to install <i>bus shelters</i> at bus stops (Shelters should be consistent in design with planned streetscape furniture planned for Union Square's rebuilt streets and sidewalks.)	OHCD	MBTA	MBTA funds. [MBTA will provide "standard" shelters. More elaborate shelters may require funding supplements.]
T-T- 2	City continues to work with MBTA to resolve Urban Ring Phase 2 BRT bus routes through Union Square	OHCD	MBTA	
T-T- 3	City encourages MBTA to establish commuter rail service to Union Square by 2004 as <i>substitution service</i> for the temporary shut-down of Green Line service to Lechmere Station resulting from Green Line reconstruction at North Station.	OHCD	MBTA	
T-T- 4	MBTA restudies Green Line Extension alignments to Somerville and Union Square since previous Green Line Feasibility Study was prepared over fifteen years ago.		MBTA	MBTA planning funds
CI Capital Improvements [for Public Buildings]				
CI- 1	Bow St. Police Station Reuse [See LU-1]	Board of Aldermen / OHCD		Private funding
CI- 2	Conduct market feasibility study to attract restaurant to old Union Square Fire Station. If feasible, then examine feasibility of relocating SCAT.	OHCD	SCAT	CDBG funds
CI- 3	City files Lincoln Park School redevelopment project with state for school construction reimbursement funds	School Board / Board of Aldermen/ DPW		



<b>V Visual Appearance &amp; Beautification Initiatives</b>				
V- 1	City landscapes edges of Prospect St. Public Parking Lot as part of lot expansion project	OHCD / Traffic & Parking		CDBG funds
V- 2	Property owners and merchants voluntarily help maintain cleanliness of sidewalks in front of their properties.		BIG / Property and business owners	
V- 3	City replants missing trees in tree-pits on Bow St. and elsewhere.	DPW		CDBG funds
V- 4	Sanborn Court alley is cleaned up. (See T-P-5)		Businesses and property owners abutting Sanborn Court	Private funds
V- 5	<i>NStar Site</i> : City initiates discussion with NStar to beautify edges of transformer substation site on Prospect and Webster.	Mayor's Office / OHCD	NStar / Groundwork Somerville	NStar funds
<b>P Permits, Licensing and City Approval Processes</b>				
P- 1	City revises local ordinance to allow restaurant liquor sales on "patio" areas of public sidewalks to encourage restaurant and entertainment business.	Mayor, Board of Aldermen		Ordinance amendment
P- 2	City prepares and issues consumer-friendly handbook describing the necessary steps to obtain business development permits and various other permits and licenses.	OHCD / Building Dept./ Planning		
<b>MPO Marketing, Promotion, and Organization [for ongoing stewardship of the Square]</b>				
MPO- 1	Business community collectively promotes Square in <i>print and other media advertisements</i> .[See ED-3]		BIG	Dues & fund raising

MPO- 2	Business community commissions preparation and distribution of <i>Union Square map</i> illustrating business and parking locations for benefit of visitors. [See ED-4]		BIG	Dues and fund raising [ Estimated cost: \$10,000]
MPO- 3	Business community sponsors regular <i>entertainment events in Plaza</i> . City expedites permitting.	DPW / Mayor / Aldermen / OHCD	BIG	Entertainment licenses required by performers.
MPO- 4	Business community funds <i>information kiosk</i> on Plaza.	OHCD	BIG	Dues and fund raising / CDBG funds
MPO- 5	Business community actively recruits new business and property owners to join BIG.		BIG / Chamber	

### Years 1-5: Action Initiatives

Code	Action	Responsible Party: Public Sector	Responsible Party: Private / Non-Profit Sector	Funding Sources or other Actions Required
<b>LU</b>	<b>Land Use &amp; Zoning</b>			
LU- 1	<i>Citizens Bank site:</i> City encourages discussion between three property owners on Citizens Bank block to collectively explore redevelopment of entire site for mixed use development - housing (incl. affordable) above retail shops. Development should be encouraged to include one level of public parking in structured parking facility. [See T-P- 1]	Mayor's Office / OHCD	Property owners	
LU- 2	<i>Old Union Square Fire Station:</i> City repositions old Union Square Fire Station tenancy with new restaurant / retail tenant(s) on ground floor. City may need to undertake relocation efforts for SCAT and MAPS	OHCD	SCAT, MAPS	Leases must be reviewed. Relocation funds may need to be identified.
LU- 3	<i>Recreation Commission Building:</i> City declares Recreation Comm. Building surplus after Recreation Commission offices relocate. City then advertises building for sale or lease for private redevelopment uses – as yet undefined – to redevelopers.	Board of Aldermen / OHCD / DPW / Recreation Commission	Private developers	
LU- 4	<i>Old Bow St. Police Station:</i> Building is redeveloped after sale to redevelopers.		Private redevelopers or non-profit groups.	Private funding

LU- 5	<i>Backer Bldg. / Barrister Hall:</i> City works with owners of Backer Building and Barrister Hall to encourage renovations and the leasing of upper floors as land values & rent potential increases in anticipation of new transit service.		Building owners	Private funding and possible use of funds from City's "Storefront Improvement Program"
LU- 6	<i>Zoning Ordinance Amendments</i> Amend CBD zoning district and map to: 1) extend CBD mapped district to include the east side of the Prospect St. corridor; 2) reduce "lot area per dwelling unit" requirements in CBD to encourage greater housing density; 3) reduce parking reqts. for <i>entertainment uses</i> in order to encourage new entertainment venues, 4) allow minor increases in allowed FAR and height, and 5) establish 15,000 sf cap on retail store size to discourage large chain stores.	OHCD / Planning Board / Planning Dept. / BOA		Revision of Zoning Ordinance
LU- 7	<i>Zoning Ordinance Amendment:</i> Amend CBD zoning district mapping to <i>remove</i> Bow St. from CBD District and place it in a NB (Neighborhood Business) District.	OHCD / Planning Board / Planning Dept. / BOA		Revision of Zoning Ordinance
LU- 8	City, with business community, helps establish weekend <i>Flea, Antiques or Farmers Market on Prospect St. Public Parking Lot</i> . City expedites permitting.	Traffic & Parking / DPW / OHCD	BIG / Business Improvement Group	Private Funding
<b>UD</b>	<b>Urban Design Framework</b>			
UD- 1	<i>Somerville Ave. Streetscape and Roadway Improvements [from Webster Ave. to Market Basket]:</i> City constructs new street and streetscape [See T-SP-1]	DPW / OHCD / MHD		Chapter 90 / MHD / CDBG funds
UD- 2	City reconstructs <i>Union Square Plaza</i> as part of Washington St. / Somerville Ave. reconstruction [See T-SP-2]	DPW / Traffic & Parking / OHCD		Chapter 90 / MHD / CDBG funds



<b>ED Economic Development</b>				
ED- 1	City continues to encourage property owners to take advantage of City's "Storefront Improvement Program"	OHCD		Storefront Improvement Program / CDBG funds
ED- 2	City, working with real estate brokerage community, establishes commercial leasing information clearinghouse and property database to proactively recruit desired businesses seeking space in Union Square and match them with available and suitable space available for lease.	OHCD	Real estate brokerage and realtors; BIG	
<b>RR Redevelopment and Renovation Initiatives</b>				
RR- 1	<i>Citizens Bank Site Redevelopment</i> [See LU-1]			
RR- 2	<i>Old Bow St. Police Station Redevelopment</i> [See LU-4 ]			
RR- 3	<i>Prospect St. Corridor / MBTA site:</i> City and MBTA work together with landowners to acquire land or easements on east side of Prospect St. for Phase 2 Urban Ring BRT circulation.  Some businesses may have to be relocated to accommodate the construction of the MBTA station, access roads, and parking.	City, Somerville Redevelopment Authority, MBTA		Land acquisition, assembly, and relocation funds must be set aside by MBTA.
RR- 4	<i>Prospect St. Corridor site / MBTA site:</i> MBTA undertakes environmental studies and site remediation efforts.	MBTA		Federal and State brownfield clean-up funds
RR- 5	<i>Backer Bldg. / Barrister Hall:</i> City works with owners of Backer Building and Barrister Hall to encourage renovations and the leasing of upper floors. [See LU-5]		Building owners	

<b>T-SP</b>	<b>Transportation: Streets and Pedestrian Environment</b>			
T-SP- 1	City constructs new <i>Somerville Ave. (west)</i> streets, sidewalks and tree plantings between Market Basket and Webster. [See UD-1]	DPW / OHCD / MHD		MHD / CDBG / Chapter 90 funds
<b>T-P</b>	<b>Transportation: Parking</b>			
T-P- 1	<i>Public Parking at Citizens Bank Site:</i> Public parking may be provided privately as part of Citizens Bank site redevelopment. Deal for public parking to be negotiated between redevelopers and City. [See LU-1]	City	Citizens' Bank block property owners	City may offer zoning density or height incentives in return for the private construction of public parking, or, offers parking revenues from public parking spaces to be shared with the redevelopers.
<b>T-T</b>	<b>Transportation: Transit</b>			
T-T- 1	City / MBTA acquires easements or land on east side of Prospect St. for MBTA Phase 2 Urban Ring BRT station and circulation. [See RR-3]	MBTA		
T-T- 2	City & MBTA resolve Green Line Extension alignment through Somerville and to Union Square based upon recommended Green Line Feasibility Study, Alignment Study, and Major Investment Study by the MBTA.	MBTA / OHCD		
<b>CI</b>	<b>Capital Improvements [for Public Buildings]</b>			
CI- 1	<i>Union Square Fire Station</i> is re-tenanted for restaurant and retail uses on ground floor; and/or cultural organization use on second floor. City helps identify relocation sites for SCAT. [See LU- 2]	Board of Aldermen	New restaurant / retail business owners	City may wish to contribute to SCAT relocation costs.

CI- 2	<i>Recreation Comm. Building:</i> City declares Recreation Comm. Building surplus. City then advertises building for private redevelopment uses. [See LU-3]	Board of Aldermen		
CI- 3	<i>Old Bow St. Police Station:</i> Building is redeveloped after sale or lease to redevelopers. [See LU-4]		Private redevelopers	Private funding
<b>V</b>	<b>Visual Improvements &amp; Beautification</b>			
V- 1	City renovates <i>Union Square Plaza</i> [See T-SP- 2]			
V- 2	City restores <i>new cupola</i> to old Union Square Fire Station.		Private or civic fund raising organizations	Public or Private funding
V- 3	City, together with businesses, artists, Groundworks, or other organizations, constructs new <i>Union Square clock tower</i> (or other appropriate sculpture, fountain, bus shelter pavilion, or memorial) in Plaza as new civic / visual focus	City, OHCD	BIG; Somerville artists community; Groundworks	Business community, private, and /or organizational fund raising
V- 4	<i>NStar</i> landscapes and visually screens the edges of their Prospect St. electrical substation with cooperation of artists and “green” community.		NStar; Somerville artists; Ground-works	NStar funds
<b>P</b>	<b>Permits, Licensing, and City Approval Processes</b>			
P- 1	Consider reorganization of business permitting and licensing approval processes to expedite and streamline permit applications, and, coordinate permitting process with City’s economic development agenda for Union Square	Mayor’s Office, Board of Aldermen, DPW, OHCD, Planning Board, ZBA, Licensing Commission		

P- 2	City considers release of one reserve <i>all alcoholic</i> license for incentive to attract destination restaurant to old Union Square Fire Station / SCAT Bldg. as an economic development anchor in Square	Mayor's office, Board of Aldermen, Licensing Commission		
P- 3	City fund staff position for one-stop Permit Coordinator /Advisor to guide permit and license applicants through approval process.	Building Dept., Licensing Commission, Personnel		City annual operating budget
<b>MPO</b>	<b>Marketing, Promotion &amp; Organization</b>			
MPO- 1	Business community, with City, provide a coordinated Union Square identity, wayfinding, and public parking signage system unique to Union Sq.	OHCD	BIG	Public funding from roadway / streetscape improvement project + private contributions from business community.
MPO- 2	Business community helps sponsor ongoing weekly flea, antiques, or Farmers Market at Prospect St. parking lot to attract patronage to Square.		BIG	



<b>Years 6-10: Action Initiatives</b>				
<b>Code</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible Party: Public Sector</b>	<b>Responsible Party: Private / Non-profit Sector</b>	<b>Funding Source or other Actions Required</b>
<b>LU</b>	<b>Land Use &amp; Zoning</b>			
LU- 1	<i>Somerville Ave. Development Block</i> (south side between Prospect and Webster): Private property owner(s) assemble parcels and redevelop site for mixed-use development - offices or housing over ground floor retail		Property owners	Private investment funds
LU- 2	<i>Prospect St. Corridor Development Site:</i> City works with MBTA and property owners to assemble land and redevelop block for mixed-use development (housing or offices above retail stores) and multi-modal transit station. Public parking should be one component of the development program. Some existing businesses will need to relocate. [See T-P- 1]	OHCD, SRA, MBTA	Property owners	Mix of MBTA funds, brownfield program funds, urban renewal funds, federal relocation funds, and private capital investment.
LU- 3	<i>New Public Safety Building:</i> City redevelops "Ricky's Flower Market site" and adjoining properties for new Public Safety Building. [Small retail shop(s) should be required component on ground floor at Prospect St and Somerville Ave. intersection.] Land acquisition or assembly will be required.	Board of Aldermen; SRA; Police Department; Fire Department		CDBG funds or general revenue bond issue; possibly federal relocation funds
LU- 4	<i>Lincoln Park School:</i> City reconstructs Lincoln Park Community School	School Dept. / DPW		State school construction reimbursement funds + local bond issue for local share

LU- 5	<i>Transit District Zoning Amendment:</i> City amends zoning ordinance to provide a “Transit Oriented Development” zoning overlay district within 1,500 foot radius of new transit station. [New overlay lowers minimum parking requirements. and establishes maximum parking ratios.]	Planning Board / Planning Department / OHCD / BOA		Amend Zoning Ordinance
<b>UD</b>	<b>Urban Design</b>			
UD- 1	<i>Gateway Park &amp; Plaza:</i> City working with MBTA, NStar, and Webster Auto Sales redevelops Webster Auto Sales site into new landscaped “Gateway Park” as southern entrance to Square and entry plaza to new MBTA Station.	MBTA	Webster Auto Sales; NStar; Groundworks	MBTA funds and NStar funds; federal relocation funds for Webster Auto Sales voluntary relocation
UD- 2	<i>Prospect Park:</i> City working with MBTA, NStar, Groundworks, and Souza Motors redevelops Souza Motors site into new landscaped park to help “green” Union Square.	MBTA	Souza Motors; NStar; Groundworks	MBTA funds and NStar funds; federal relocation funds for Souza Motors voluntary relocation
<b>ED</b>	<b>Economic Development</b>			
ED- 1	City continues economic development programs begun in earlier implementation phases.			
<b>RR</b>	<b>Redevelopment &amp; Renovations</b>			
RR- 1	Somerville Ave. Development Block [See LU-1]			
RR- 2	Prospect St. Corridor Development Site [See LU- 2]			
RR- 3	New Public Safety Building [See LU-3]			

<b>T-SP</b>	<b>Transportation: Streets &amp; Pedestrian Environment</b>			
T-SP- 1	<i>Prospect St. development site internal streets:</i> MBTA constructs new streets and pedestrian ways within Prospect St. corridor development site to accommodate BRT and drop-off circulation.	MBTA		MBTA capital funds for Phase 2 Urban Ring
<b>T-P</b>	<b>Transportation: Parking</b>			
T-P- 1	<i>Prospect St. Development Site Public Parking Deck:</i> Private developers construct new public parking deck within new mixed-use private development. This public parking replaces parking at the current Prospect St. parking lot and the public parking lot on Washington St. across from the Post Office and adds new public parking. [See LU- 2]	Traffic & Parking	Private developers	City may offer zoning density or height incentives in return for the private construction of public parking, or, city may offer parking revenues from public parking spaces to the redevelopers.
<b>T-T</b>	<b>Transportation: Transit</b>			
T-T- 1	MBTA completes construction of Phase II BRT / Bus Rapid Transit Urban Ring service and new Commuter Rail Station.	MBTA		MBTA capital construction funds
T-T- 2	MBTA completes construction of Green Line extension serving the Union Square Area.	MBTA		MBTA capital construction funds; other federal sources
<b>CI</b>	<b>Capital Improvements [Public Buildings]</b>			
CI- 1	<i>New Public Safety Building:</i> New facility is constructed by City. [See LU-3]			
CI- 2	<i>Lincoln Park Community School:</i> City reconstructs Lincoln Park School. [See LU- 4]			

<b>V Visual Improvements &amp; Beautification</b>				
V- 1	<i>Gateway Park &amp; Plaza:</i> MBTA constructs new “Gateway Park” on current site of Webster Auto Sales. [See UD-1]	MBTA		
V- 2	<i>Prospect Park:</i> City, MBTA and NStar construct “Prospect Park” to help “green” Square. [See UD-2 ]	NStar, MBTA, City		

<b>Ten Years &amp; Beyond: Action Initiatives</b>				
<b>Code</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible Party: Public Sector</b>	<b>Responsible Party: Private / Non-profit Sector</b>	<b>Funding Source or other Actions Required</b>
<b>LU Land Use &amp; Zoning</b>				
LU- 1	<i>Ricky’s Flower Market Site Redevelopment:</i> If the City had not earlier constructed the new Public Safety Building at this location, the City should then work with Ricky’s and the several other adjoining property owners to assemble the land and encourage the owners to construct a new mixed-use development at this site to take full advantage of proximity to the new transit station near by.	OHCD	Property owners	Private funding
<b>RR Redevelopment &amp; Renovation Initiatives</b>				
RR- 1	<i>Ricky’s Flower Market Site Redevelopment:</i> [See LU-1]			



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## **Phasing Plans & Scenarios**

To provide a visual image of how Union Square may appear after redevelopment in the one to five year time period and in the six to ten year time period, the following phasing maps and 3-D views are provided.



## Union Square Master Plan

City of Somerville, MA

Mayor Dorothy A. Kelly Gray

Office of Housing &  
Community Development

- 1 SCAT BLDG. AND PLAZA
- 2 KILEY BARREL
- 3 HEAD START CENTER
- 4 SITE FOR SALE
- 5 BOW ST. POLICE STATION
- 6 BACKER BLDG. RENOVATION
- 7 BARRISTER HALL RENOVATION
- 8 CITIZENS BANK BLOCK REDEVELOPMENT
- 9 RECREATION COMMISSION BLDG./ CONVERSION TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING
- 10 SITE FOR SALE

0' 100' 300'

Bluestone Planning Group  
with  
Stall and Lee, Inc.  
Larry Koff Associates  
Howard/Stein-Hudson, Inc.  
Todreas Hanley Associates

**PHASE II  
REDEVELOPMENT SITES  
1-5 YEARS**

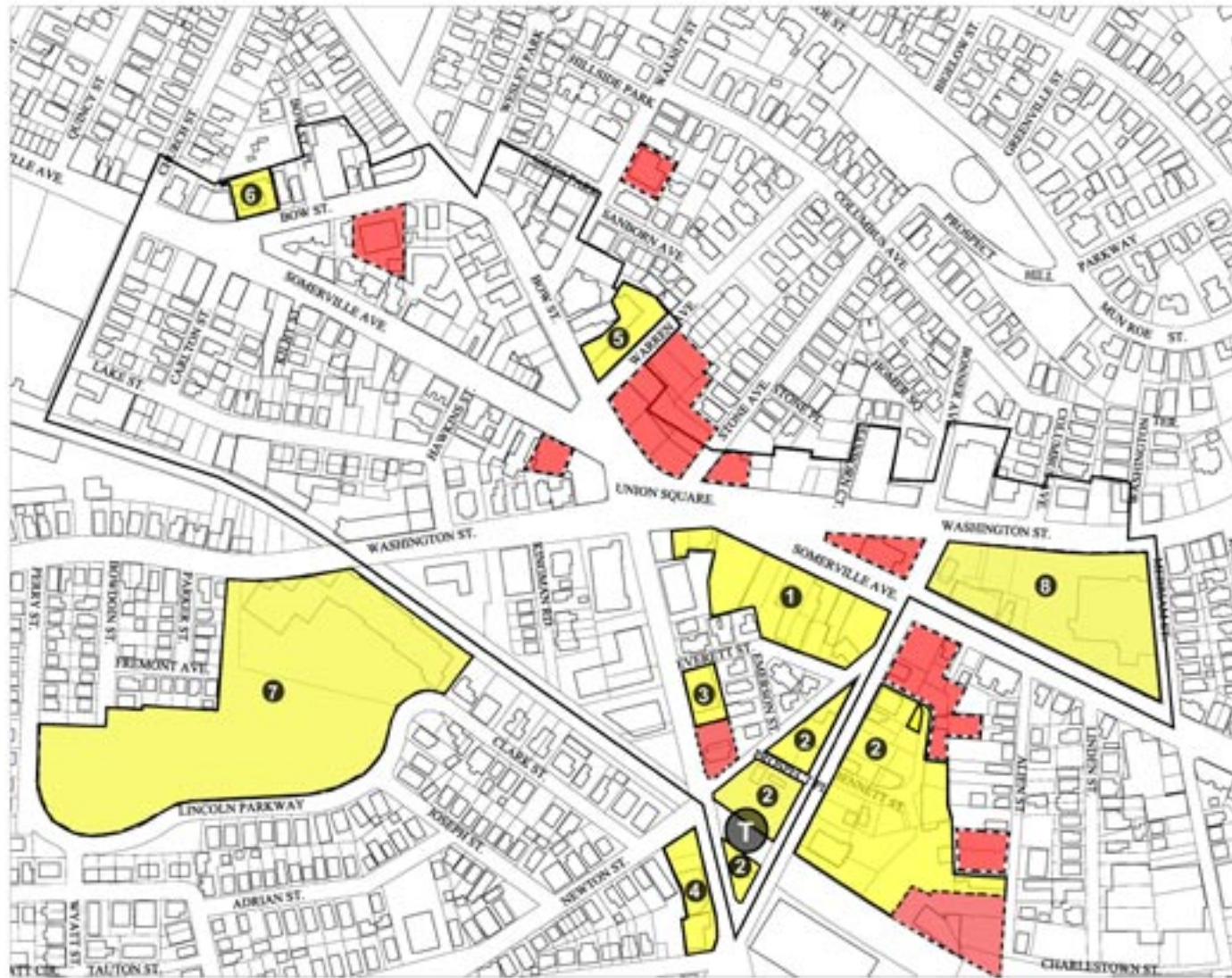
Phase II: Years 1-5





Phase II: Years 1-5





## Union Square Master Plan

City of Somerville, MA

Mayor Dorothy A. Kelly City

Office of Housing & Community Development

- 1 SOMERVILLE AVE. SOUTHSIDE REDEVELOPMENT
- 2 PROSPECT ST. CORRIDOR REDEVELOPMENT
- 3 COMM. BUILDERS COOPERATIVE REDEVELOPMENT
- 4 AUTO ROW
- 5 GOODYEAR
- 6 LIEN AUTO
- 7 LINCOLN PARK COMMUNITY SCHOOL
- 8 PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING

- T NEW T STATION
- COMPLETED IN PREVIOUS PHASES

0' 100' 300'

Bluestone Planning Group  
with  
Stall and Lee, Inc.  
Larry Koff Associates  
Howard/Stein-Hudson, Inc.  
Todoreas Hanley Associates

**PHASE III  
REDEVELOPMENT SITES  
5-10 YEARS**

Phase 3:P Years 6-10





Phase 3:P Years 6-10



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**Appendix A: Existing Conditions, Strengths, Issues, &  
Opportunities**  
Union Square Master Plan





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## **APPENDIX A: Existing Conditions, Strengths, Issues & Opportunities**

### **Union Square Revitalization Study / Phase 2 Master Plan**

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Union Square – A Brief History</b>	<b>A-1</b>
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## 1.0 Union Square – A Brief History

Union Square has a significant and diverse history that dates to the colonial era. Nearby, atop Prospect Hill, General George Washington and his troops of the Continental Army in 1776 raised the “Great Union Flag” to the top of the mast on Prospect Hill overlooking British troops then occupying the Boston Shawmut peninsula. Purportedly, this was the first colonial flag raised in the Revolutionary War.

The historic heart of Union Square – the Bow St / Somerville Ave. / Washington St. intersection – is the site of the oldest commercial district in Somerville. The area originally contained a marsh at the edge of the Miller’s River near Allen St., and Bow Street followed the perimeter of the marsh. Somerville Avenue was later constructed over the marsh in 1813.

The area at the intersection of three main streets became the gateway for goods into Boston’s larger markets via bridges or ferries. As a result, Union Square grew rapidly as a commercial and residential center. Businesses such as blacksmith and wheelwrights serving travelers and then later brickyards, slaughterhouses and the Union Glass Company flourished. The Square’s development was further accelerated by the construction of the railroad in 1835 after which many manufacturing facilities then began to locate near the rail yards and rail corridors.

The first horse-drawn street car system in the Boston area was established between Union Square and Harvard Square in 1852. And so, dating back even to the mid-nineteenth century, Union Square had already become a transit node. During the Civil War, the Square was used as a Union Army recruiting center, thereby giving Union Square its present name.

The Square’s commercial retail goods and services center continued to grow as well. In 1869, Union Square’s first commercial block (Masonic Hall) was constructed. It housed an apothecary, shoe shop, offices and a meeting hall. The development of Masonic Hall inspired an era of high-style architecture in the growing commercial district. Brick row houses, apartments and hotels also were built. By 1900, the Miller’s River and the Marsh were filled to alleviate pollution and development continued. In the early 1900s, electric streetcars made 88 stops a day in Union Square to bring commuters to Boston. Based upon historic photographs of the Square dating to 1915, Union Square was obviously a bustling center of activity. Many electric streetcar and trolley lines are evident and many of the commercial buildings and blocks rose to three, four and five stories – higher and more dense than the development that exists today. Union Square was indeed a “lively historic crossroads”. With the coming widespread use of the automobile by mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, consumers were given greater mobility which led to changes in shopping patterns and locations of new development. As was true for many historic urban commercial centers, Union Square lost ground to outlying competing locations and began to decline.



Union Square in 1915

In 1980, a portion of Union Square was declared an “Urban Renewal Area”. As a result of this program and TOPICS funding, streetscape, parking and storefront improvements were addressed. At this time, Union Square Plaza was constructed, the Washington Street parking lot built, and roads were reconfigured. New tenants filled the old police and fire stations located in the Square as well. These 1980s-era improvements made a notable improvement in the Square’s environment and economic health.

## 2.0 Union Square Today

Union Square today is a commercial business district and collection of surrounding residential neighborhoods whose diversity is reflected in the following demographic summaries:

***Table 1: Population Demographics, 2000***

	Union Square		City of Somerville	
	# of people	% of total	# of people	% of total
White alone	6,447	72.5	59,635	77.0
Black or African American Alone	615	6.9	5,035	6.5
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	25	0.3	171	0.2
Asian alone	590	6.6	4,990	6.4
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	4	<0.1	50	0.1
Some other race alone	744	8.4	3,840	5.0
Population of one race	8,425	94.7	73,721	95.2
Population of two or more races	469	5.3	3,757	4.8
Hispanic or Latino	959	10.8	6,786	8.8
Not Hispanic or Latino	7,935	89.2	70,692	91.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,894</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>77,478</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: U.S. 2000 Census*



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**Table 2: Means of Transportation to Work, Workers 16 Years and Over**

Transportation to Work	Union Square		Somerville City	
	# of people who use this transportation	% of total	# of people who use this transportation	% of total
Drive alone	2,078	41.4	20,363	45.3
Carpool	692	13.8	4,648	10.3
<b>Car, Truck, or Van Total</b>	<b>2,770</b>	<b>55.2</b>	<b>25,011</b>	<b>55.6</b>
Bus or trolley bus	832	18.6		
Streetcar or trolley	17	0.3		
Subway or elevated	408	8.1		
Railroad	36	0.7		
Taxicab	15	0.3		
<b>Public Transportation Total</b>	<b>1,306</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>13,129</b>	<b>29.2</b>
Motorcycle	9	0.2		
Bicycle	238	4.7		
Walk	553	11.0	4,246	9.4
Other means	39	0.8	1,518	3.4
Work at home	107	2.1	1,073	2.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,022</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>44,977</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: U.S. 2000 Census

## 2.1 Surrounding Context & Competing Centers

Union Square had been known in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the “crossroads” with many electric streetcar and trolley lines converging there. In more recent years, after the electric streetcar and trolley lines disappeared, new rapid transit lines were not extended to Union Square. As a result, Union Square has been left as an island, isolated from major regional transit connections. Today, Union Square is surrounded by a great variety and range of competing neighborhood, community and regional shopping centers in Cambridge and elsewhere in Somerville most with either better transit and auto access and often with greater parking supply. Furthermore, traffic congestion within Union Square during peak travel times restricts the Square’s commercial draw and appeal.

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Table 3 identifies the major competing neighborhood, community and regional shopping centers surrounding Union Square.

❑ *Regional Shopping Centers*

Within a 3 mile radius, Union Square is surrounded by 4 major regional shopping centers. These centers offer a broad range of general merchandise and specialty goods. CambridgeSide Galleria is only 1.5 miles away. This center, in particular, is major competition for Union Square. It contains 850,000 sq. ft. of space including Sears, Filene's and Best Buy as anchors, a traditional mix of apparel and a large food court.

❑ *Community Shopping Centers*

Community Shopping Centers are also conveniently located within easy access to Union Square. Twin City Plaza has a Star Market, Hollywood Express, Certified Fitness, Dots, and other national chain and convenience stores. Plans are underway to transform Assembly Square into a livable, mixed-use shopping center and office research area, including a potential new stop on the Orange Line (between Sullivan Station and Wellington Station) to help promote the area. Assembly Square currently offers a Home Depot, a Circuit City, Loew's Theatre, a limited service 150-room hotel called the Tage Inn, and an underutilized mall. Furthermore, with the recent opening of Target as well as the presence of A. J. Wright on the perimeter of Union Square, Union Square's resident population has convenient access to a broad range of price sensitive, apparel, general merchandise, home furnishings, and specialty shopping goods.

❑ *Neighborhood Shopping Centers*

Five of six neighboring retail centers (Inman, Central, Harvard, Porter, Davis, and Kendall) are located within 1.5 miles of Union Square. These adjacent, competitive centers are accessible from the Union Square area by auto and to a more limited extent by bus service. Five of the six competing centers are at Red Line rapid transit stations and are therefore easily accessible to those beyond the immediate neighborhood. All of these retail areas provide a range of food, restaurant, entertainment, specialty shopping and convenience items. A summary of the characteristics of these competing centers is indicated on Table 3. Each of these centers draws from their own surrounding residential neighborhoods; yet, each has a number of destination restaurants, bars, clubs and shops that expand their customer base. Harvard Square is unique as a downtown regional center. It is a tourist destination with a niche in specialty bookstores, upscale shopper goods, theatres, and restaurants. The market niche or identity of each of these competing centers helps define as well as limit Union Square's own market identity and potential.

**Table 3: Characteristics of Competitive Neighborhood Retail Districts**

Location	Retail Mix						Anchors	Civic
	Convenience	Super Mkt.	Shopping Goods	Eating/drinking	Entertainment	Other		
Inman	some ethnic	Food Master	boutiques	Pubs/Rest	Jazz, Comedy Club	Health-related office	Restaurants, clubs	Fire Station
Central	yes	Harvest/Bread & Circus	some	Pubs/Rest/ Take-out	Bars, clubs	Hard-ware	Clubs, market, restaurants	City Hall, Post Office
Harvard	gourmet	No	National/ International	Pubs/Rest/ Take-out	Theaters, Cinema, bars, clubs	Harvard/Office	Harvard	College
Porter		Star	National	Pubs/Rest	No		Shopping Ctr./ Lesley College	Lesley College
Davis	ethnic	No	No	Pubs/Rest/ Take-out	Clubs, cinema, theater		Rest/ Entertainment	Soc. Security, Post Office
Kendall	yes	No	No	Pubs/Rest/ Take-out	Cinema	Hotels/ Office	MIT/Hotels	MIT
<b>Union Square</b>	Ethnic food	Market Basket	T.J. Wright, Target	Sit down restaurant	limited	Auto repair	Offices, restaurants, ethnic food, Nail salons	Public Safety, Post Office

**Table 4: Access Characteristics**

Location	Access			
	Transit	Parking	Traffic Flow	Pedestrian Circulation
Inman	Bus only	Private lots, on street	Moderate	Comfortable
Central	Red Line, bus	public	Heavy	
Harvard	Red Line, bus	public	Heavy	
Porter	Red Line, bus	Shopping center lot.	Moderate / Heavy	
Davis	Red Line, bus	On street, limited public	Moderate	Comfortable
Kendall	Red Line, bus	Private garages with public parking	Moderate / Heavy	
<b>Union Square</b>	Bus only	On street, limited public, Some private lots	Congested during day	Not comfortable

Below are described some highlights of several of these nearby competing neighboring retail centers:



Central Square

**Central Square:**

With over 190,000 square feet of food, specialty stores, coffee shops, restaurants, and premier nightclub and entertainment destinations, Central Square has been described as a 'classic American urban commercial district.' Most of the businesses are locally owned. The district is conveniently located at the Central Red Line subway station, on several bus lines, and also includes major civic uses including City Hall, a Post Office, and major religious institutions. Three fourths of the shoppers are drawn from the adjacent residential areas of Cambridgeport, Riverside, Area 4, and Mid-Cambridge. The balance of shoppers are from the secondary shopping area which extends to Union Square on the north, Charles River to the east and south, and Harvard Street and Massachusetts Avenue to the west. Also, there are an increasing number of office workers in the area concentrated in several multi-story office buildings in the heart of the Square. Just recently, a major residential development – the Holmes Building – was constructed on the Square's 100% corner – thereby further increasing a supporting residential population.

Food stores and the mix of retail, restaurant, and entertainment uses creates a synergy of day-night activity which are a major draw. A recent survey of shoppers found that if the district could improve the variety and quality of local shopping, more of the residents in the adjacent neighborhoods would be attracted to shop more frequently. A consultant hired by the City of Cambridge several years ago recommended that the district seek to add 96,200 square feet of space to fill "under-served categories" as a means of bringing new vitality to the Square's economy.<sup>2</sup> Proposed uses for Central Square include those often suggested for Union Square including apparel, bookstore,



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card and gift shop, shoe, jewelry, optical. The consultant also found through a phone survey that residents earning above \$60,000 would be attracted to shop more frequently in Central Square if there was a moderate price point food store such as Market Basket. Since the consultant made his recommendations, Central Square has markedly upgraded and has attracted several regional and national chain stores such as Tello's, Starbuck's, Payless Shoes and the Gap. Bread and Circus has also opened their flagship store on Putnam Avenue which serves the Central Square district.

#### *Inman Square*

Whereas Union Square functions in some ways as a mixed use center for the City of Somerville, Inman Square primarily serves the local neighborhood with some of its restaurants and entertainment venues attracting a regional market. The mix of ethnic restaurants, cafes, offices, and convenience stores characterize the square as a center for the residential community that surrounds it. Portuguese and Brazilian influences are prevalent in the types of retail, office, and restaurant establishments found on the eastern extension of Inman Square.

The area immediately surrounding the square contains two churches, four banks, a nursery school, an Antique Market, health clinics, a drug store, a Food Master supermarket (in Somerville but part of the Inman Square area), a Fire Station, hardware store, a pharmacy, an art gallery, a bicycle shop, a large number of street offices serving travel, beauty salons/nail shops and the Cambridge Hospital. Supporting activities are the entertainment and restaurant uses. Ryles Jazz Club is a well-established entertainment magnet for the larger Cambridge and Somerville area, as is the comedy club Improv Boston. Of the fourteen restaurants located in Inman Square, six clustered together can clearly be distinguished as serving a regional draw. The bus is the only public transportation that goes through Inman Square, and there are no public parking lots. Three businesses, Ryles, S&S restaurant, and the East Cambridge Savings Bank, offer private parking for customers. Fellucci Plaza, at the intersection of Cambridge and Hampshire/Beacon Streets, helps to create a pedestrian atmosphere. Merchants in Inman Square claim rents are relatively inexpensive, and people walk to the Square from Harvard and Central Squares.



Inman Square

#### *Davis Square*

Davis Square is a mix between a traditional neighborhood business center and a regional night time entertainment district. As a neighborhood retail center it serves a local clientele, many of whom walk to and from the Square to use the 'T'. There are several market rate apartments literally in the Square, and several of the surrounding houses have been converted into condos and command high rental rates. There is continual demand for housing in and near the Square from people who prefer to take public transportation instead of a car to work. Most stores in Davis Square rely heavily on this foot traffic for sales. The night time entertainment venues attract students from Tufts and other colleges in Cambridge, as well as, young professionals who live nearby. The entertainment and restaurant tenants note that Davis Square is to Tufts as Harvard Square is to Harvard.



Davis Square

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For night time attractions there are several (11) restaurants with liquor licenses, the Somerville Theatre for live and cinematic entertainment, an Improvisational theatre, and 4 restaurants - Johnny D's, Red Bones, Orleans, and The Burren - with live entertainment on the weekends. Most of the 15 eateries without liquor stay open at night, have outdoor seating and serve as café's, coffee houses and meeting places. The book stores, McIntyre Moore and Buck a Book, West Coast Video, and the food and convenience markets also stay open in the evening. On a Friday Night survey between 8 and 9 PM, all eating places were filled to capacity, with the exception of McDonalds.

Although the day time population on the Square is heavily drawn from the neighborhood and offices, the Social Security Office and a few specialty retailers, the Caning Shop, Disc Diggers and the McIntyre Moore bookstore are a regional draw. The Harvard Vanguard Medical office building and the seven banks draw a significant daytime population to the Square.

The retail tenant mix of Davis Square differs slightly from Porter, Harvard and Central Squares because of its absence of large chain operations. It is mainly a mix of small independent retailers and eateries, with only the chains of Starbucks, Au Bon Pain, Dunkin' Donuts and McDonalds in the mix. There are five small metered parking lots and on street parking for the public, and two small metered lots for merchants.

People and tenants in Davis Square refer to it as "hip", "trendy", "bohemian" and "not as expensive as Boston", which they believe is the key to its success. According to some merchants, rental rates have tripled since the T opened. Since that time many of the older tenants and residents have been forced out of the Square. Retail rents currently range from \$15.00 to \$25.00 per square foot, and the only significant vacancies in and around the Square are in the office buildings. This type of vacancy has not had a serious effect on the economic health of the other uses in Davis Square thus far.

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## 2.2 Summary Demographics and Incomes of Surrounding Neighborhoods

**Table 5: Summary Trade Area Demographics**

Characteristics	Union Square	Central Square	City of Somerville	City of Cambridge		
	Primary market area	Secondary market area	Primary market area	Secondary market area (Includes Inman Sq.)		
Population (2000)	14,839	384,092	43,033	69,897	93,628	101,355
% Change 1990-2000	-.04%	-.02%	-.03%	+.02%	1.7%	5.8%
Median Age (2000)	35	33.8	31	34	34.5	30.4
Households (1999)	6241	168,631	17,130	28,498	31,535	42,635
Median Household Income (1999)	\$38,583	\$43,410	\$38,307	\$40,153	\$46,315	\$47,979

## 2.3 Existing Land Use & Ownership Summary

There is a great diversity of land uses in Union Square today that continue to reflect Union Square's commercial, residential and industrial origins. The heart of Union Square is the commercial core or central business district, which is predominantly convenience retail and service oriented on the ground floors of buildings. There are a wide diversity of restaurants and food markets, which provide Union Square with a considerable reputation regionally. However, there is also a dearth of traditional retail stores selling general merchandise and apparel. There is some professional or business office space, but not a considerable amount, on upper levels. Many of these upper story office spaces are occupied by non-profit and social service organizations. The majority of upper floor spaces, however, are residential apartments. In several key buildings, there are upper floor vacancies as well.

At the eastern side of Union Square near the intersection of Prospect Street, Somerville Avenue and Washington Street, there is a cluster of government buildings and functions that provide the core of a small civic or government center.

Union Square also has a high concentration of non-profit cultural, civic, charitable and community

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social service organizations – including the Community Action Agency (CAAS) of Somerville, Somerville Head Start, the Boys & Girls Club, Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS), Catholic Charities, several shelters for women and the elderly, health clinics, and drop-in day centers.

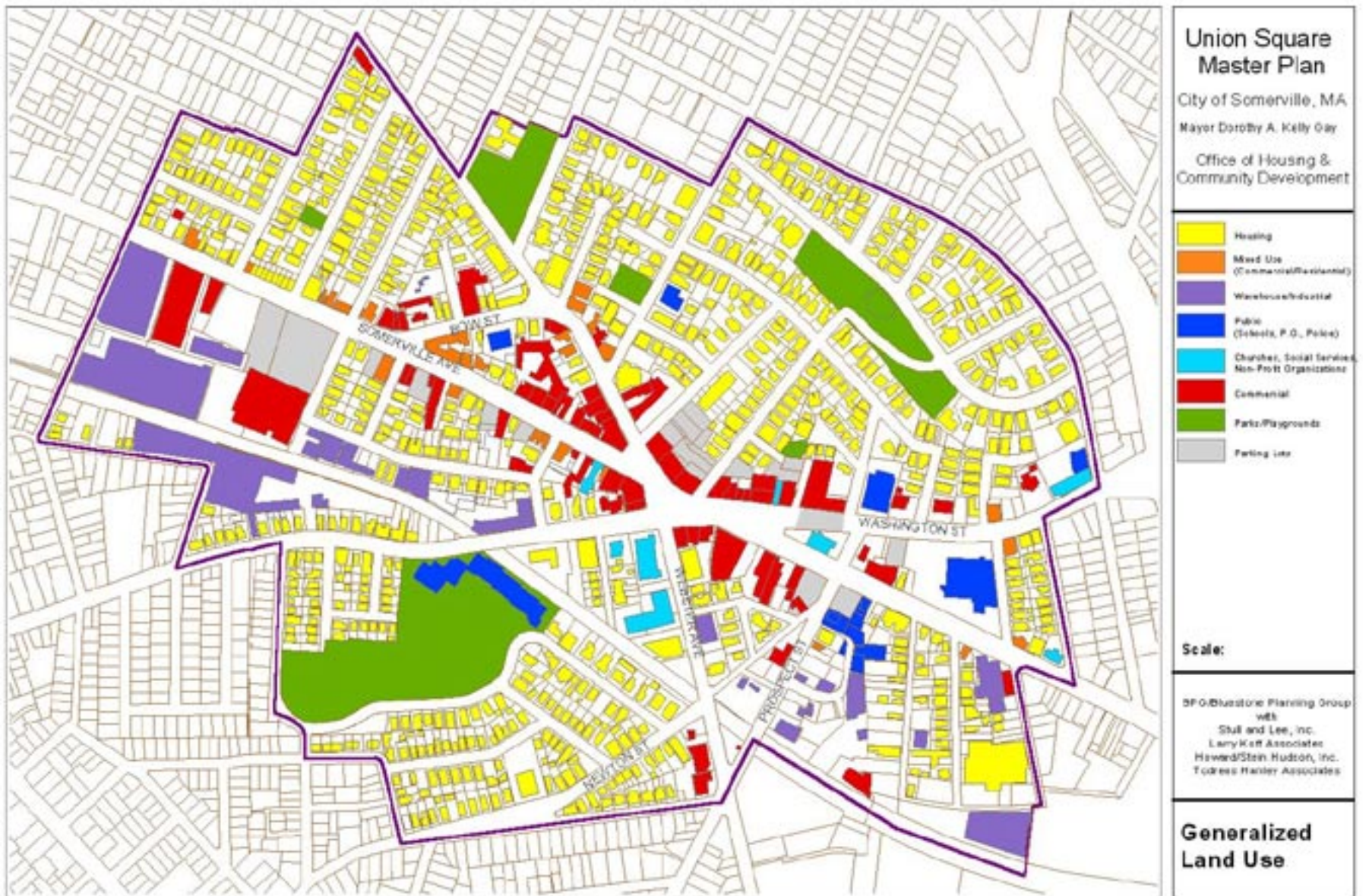
The commercial core is surrounded by relatively dense residential neighborhoods of predominantly two and three story homes and apartments. There are several Somerville Housing Authority operated senior housing projects located around the Square as well.

A variety of industrial and warehouse uses adjoin the Fitchburg Branch rail line to the south of the Square primarily in Boynton Yards to the southeast of the Square, and automotive repair and sales businesses are scattered throughout the commercial and industrial areas but are particularly concentrated along the Prospect Street and Webster Ave southern approaches to the Square.

□ *Generalized Land Use*

Housing is the main use of land within the Union Square Study Area and comprises 84.2% of constructed establishments/buildings. Commercial usage is the second largest use, accounting for 7.4% of all uses. This includes all types of commercial uses, including convenience stores, restaurants, bars, entertainment places, shopping stores, professional and personal services, warehouse and industrial uses, auto repair and sales stores, and home services and improvement stores. These establishments dominate the intersection of Washington Street, Somerville Avenue, and Webster Avenue. Warehouse and industrial uses are prevalent in the region between Somerville Avenue and the Fitchburg Main Line railroad track, and account for 3.7% of the total land use in the area. Mixed use buildings of both commercial and residential uses (2.9% of the total) are found along the major thoroughways. Both public buildings and churches, social services and non-profit organizations account for under 1% of the total land use in the project area.



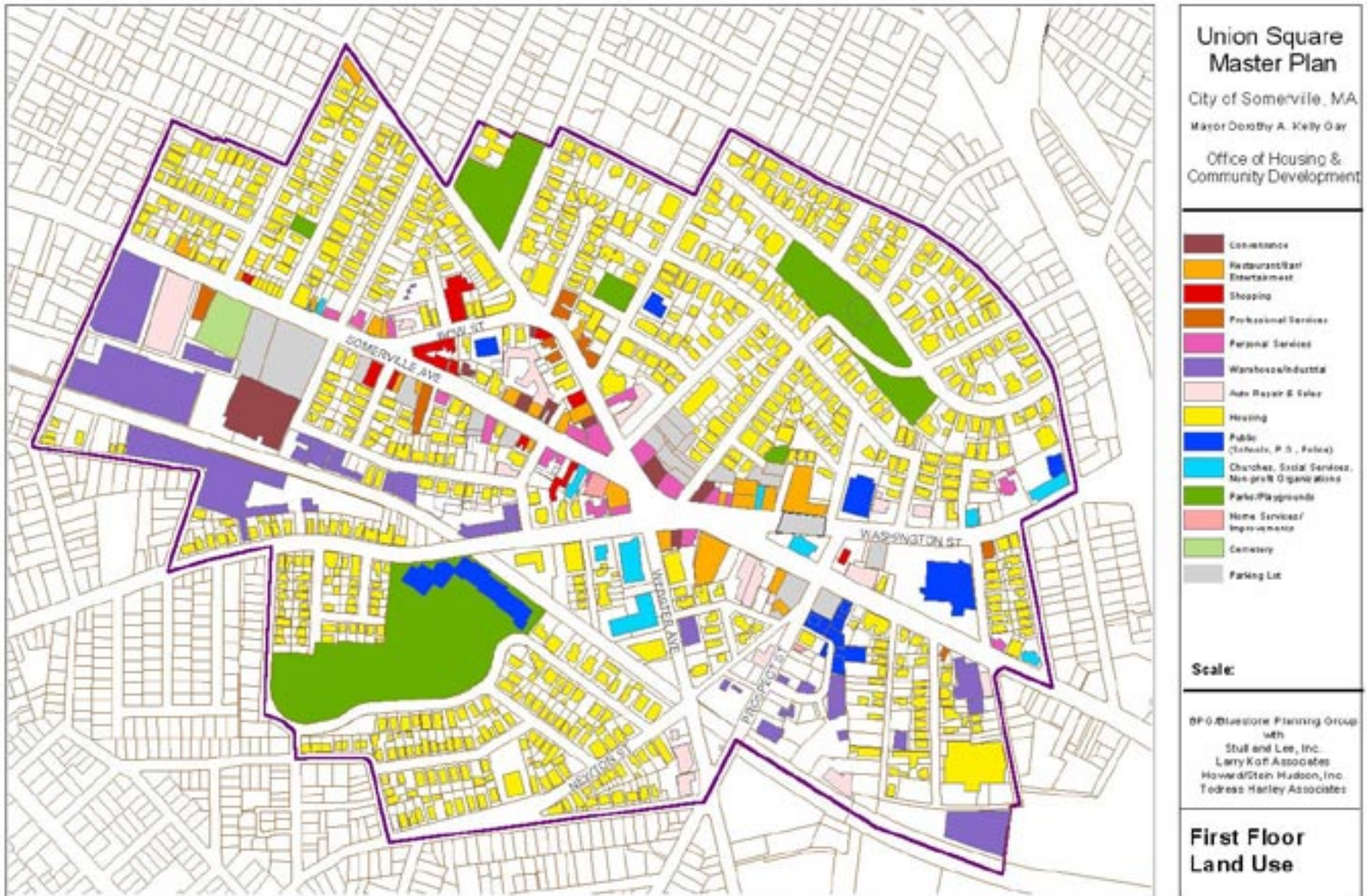


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❑ *Commercial Land Use / Ground Floor*

The majority of commercial building use in Union Square is warehouse or industrial. 26.5% of the commercial establishments are dedicated to this use. These parcels tend to be larger than the other parcels used for commercial purposes in the area. The most frequent commercial use after warehouse and industrial use is restaurant/bar/entertainment use (17.4%), and auto repair/sales and personal services (15.9% each). Personal services are tightly clustered around the Square, while auto repairs/sales and restaurant/bar/entertainment establishments are more dispersed. Shopping accounts for 9.1% of the commercial establishments, much of which is centered at the intersection of Somerville Avenue and Bow Street. Professional services and convenience stores each comprise 6.8% of the commercial uses in the area, while home services and improvements account for 1.5% of the commercial establishments.



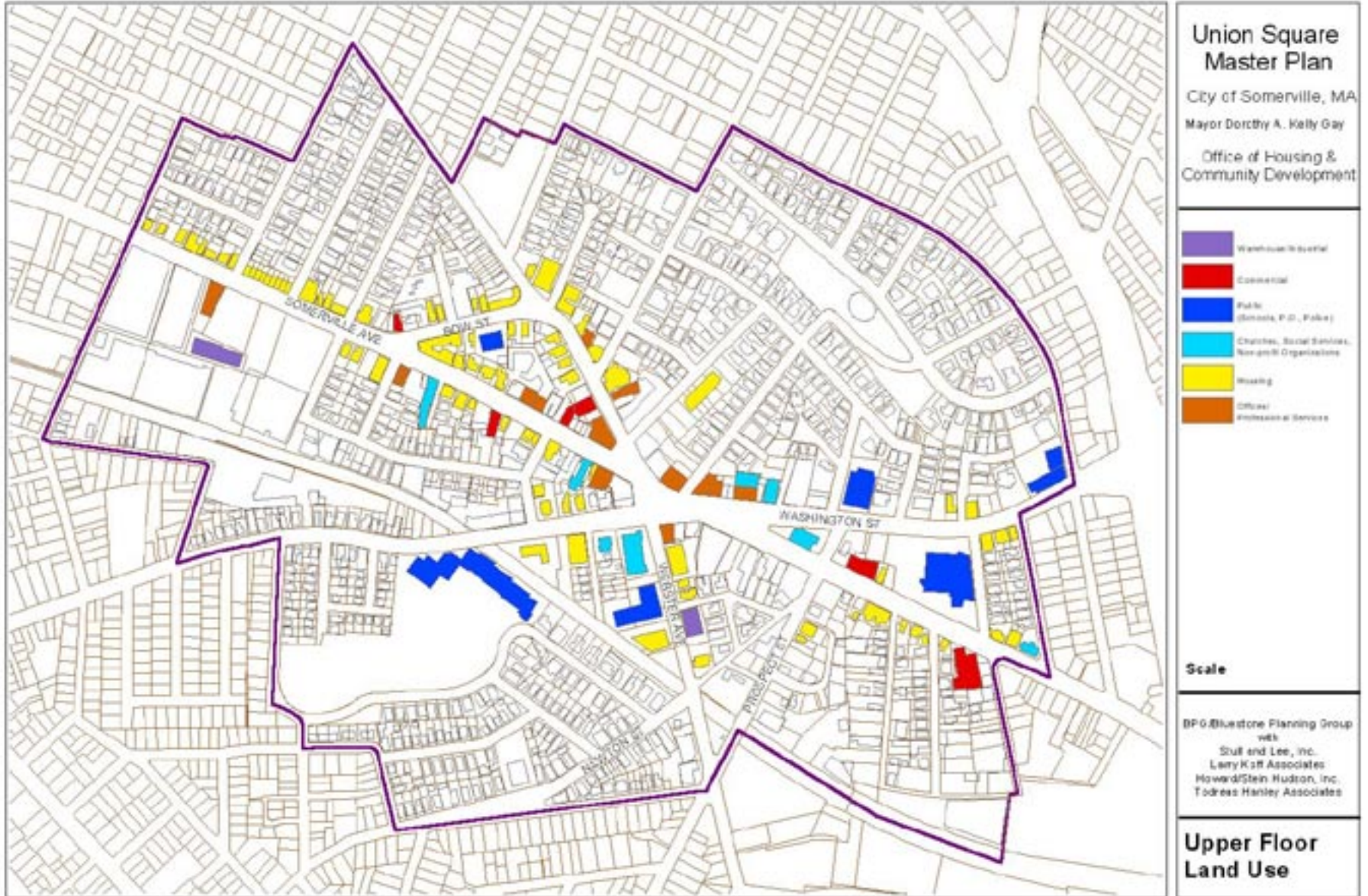


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❑ *Upper Floor Land Uses*

Upper Floor Land Use in Union Square is devoted primarily to housing (69.7% of the uses), then to office space (11.5% of the uses), then churches/non-profits (6.6%), public buildings (5.7%), commercial activity (4.9%), and industrial/warehouse uses (1.6%). Buildings with upper floor uses are predominantly located along the major thoroughways of Washington Street, Somerville Avenue, and Webster Avenue. Public uses tend to be located at the east end of Union Square, industrial uses to the south and west, offices in the central area of the Square, and commercial and churches/social services/non-profits dispersed evenly throughout the area. Multiple-story housing units are clustered to the west of the Square. There are several vacant upper-floor commercial spaces in the heart of Union Square - in the Barrister Building, at the former Union Square Bistro, and the Elegant Furniture Building on Somerville Avenue.







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❑ *Land Ownership Pattern / Major Land Owners*

A distinguishing characteristic of Union Square is the absence of large parcels and the multitude of individual owners. There is no *major* assemblage of private land-ownership in Union Square although several owners own multiple lots (i.e. Prospect Iron & Steel / MS Bennett Corp. and several properties owned by the Backer family). There are 33 properties in Union Square with a square footage of more than 20,000 sq.ft. Uses of these 33 buildings include schools, supermarkets, warehouses, fire station, outbuildings, auto sales and repair shop, bank, services, store/shop, office, clubs/lodge, vacant land, restaurants, religious institutions, apartments and a funeral home.

The City of Somerville owns both the largest parcels and the largest number of parcels (i.e. a school and four municipal buildings). Additionally, the Somerville Boys and Girls Club, the Somerville Redevelopment Authority, the Somerville Housing Authority and the United States Postal Service own large properties in Union Square.

The other large landowners are corporations which own primarily industrial property. The owners include DSM Realty Inc of Tewksbury, MA, Bornstein Louis and Co Inc., Linden Street Limited Partnership of Somerville, and Extra Space of Somerville of Salt Lake City Utah. These large parcels are located for the most part south of Washington Street and Somerville Avenue, along the railroad tracks.

## **2.4 Public / City Properties**

As mentioned above, the City of Somerville is a significant landowner in the Square. Although Union Square is not Somerville's government center or site of City Hall, Union Square maintains the semblance of a small civic and government center at the eastern end of the Square. Within this "civic" center is the US Post Office, Somerville's Public Safety Building, and the city-owned former Fire Station now tenanted by the local cable TV company and a non-profit organization. Two blocks to the east are the Somerville School Committee's rented offices on Washington Street, and one or two blocks north on Walnut Street is the Recreation Commission office in a converted former school building. On Bow Street one or two blocks to the west is the former Bow Street Police Station, which is now being examined for conversion to new uses by the City.

## **2.5 Commercial Mix / Current Rent Levels**

❑ *The Commercial Mix*

Union Square is truly a mixed use district. Of the approximately 1 million square feet of space, one third is allocated to office use, one third to retail, and the balance to services and manufacturing. This mix of uses ensures that the district is a viable commercial center serving residents, employees, and customers from the neighborhood as well as the region. On the other hand, the mix of businesses in Union Square has particular problems which limits the vitality and growth of commercial activity. A dominant retail theme - restaurants - needs more market support than the

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current office and service/manufacturing uses provide. The convenience and shopping goods sectors, that could provide a complement to the tenant mix and attract a greater market, are limited in the variety of goods provided and lack an inviting appearance.

**Table 6: Summary of Union Square Commercial Mix**

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290,724 sf	Professional services
49,577 sf	Retail
72,856 sf	Restaurants
132,063 sf	Food Stores
115,293 sf	Auto Uses
111,368 sf	Home services / improvements
103,963 sf	Industry / manufacturing
88,000 sf	Personal Services
24,616 sf	<u>Fraternal organizations</u>
988,460 sf	Total

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It is worth summarizing particular aspects of this inventory to highlight the district's characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. While office uses (professional services) are seemingly the dominant use in terms of square footage, almost one third of this space is allocated to the city's Public Safety Building. The majority of the offices are, in fact, relatively small with the average space being 4,600 square feet. Furthermore, it has been noted that almost 40% of the office space is utilized by social service providers. These often tend to generate less economic potential than professional office users such as finance, legal, real estate.

Retail uses form a second dominant cluster around ethnic food stores and restaurants. These uses are one of the major draws in the Square. Market Basket is a popular free-standing supermarket offering a variety of food at affordable prices in a mid-sized store by today's standards (46,278 sf). In addition there are twelve specialty ethnic restaurants and six convenience stores. All of these stores draw from segments of the local residential market, and, some in particular from the region.

While the presence of these uses is considered one of the district's assets, it was noted that in comparison to the square footage of a "typical neighborhood Center", Union Square does not have the type of food and food service traditionally found in a neighborhood shopping center – e.g. coffee, ice cream and sandwich shops.<sup>5</sup> The current restaurants, as well as some of the ethnic food stores, suffer from an insufficient customer base. The restaurants, in particular, lack a day-time customer base as well as a lively cohesive night-time environment found at other competing squares.

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The other components of the retail mix also vary from those of a “typical” neighborhood center. There is a void in certain merchandise categories: women, children, men, and family apparel, as well as in convenience, health and beauty aids. If, on the other hand, one counts the new Target store and the A.J. Wright store at the perimeter of the district, many of these voids, other than specialty items, are filled. These stores are approximately the same distance from the center of Union Square, approximately ¼ mile, as the Market Basket. However, from a market perspective, these large chain stores must draw regionally and depend on the proximity to the McGrath and O’Brien Highway. They cannot rely only on the local Union Square market. Their very proximity to the Square could become an advantage and bring customers into the Square *if* the identity, parking, pedestrian links, and sense of safety were established, and, the Square had unique small shops, galleries, cafes, and a pleasant pedestrian environment.

The third dominant commercial theme in the square is services and manufacturing. These are uses not found in a typical neighborhood or commercial center at the scale to which they exist in Union Square. Some of these uses are compatible with the mixed use character of Union Square; others interfere with the mix of a viable retail business district. While personal and service retailers (e.g. nail, hair salons, travel agents) meet the needs of local residents, this tenant type is more numerous in Union Square than in other neighborhood business districts. The karate and dance studios in the Square are a use now found in many neighborhood districts, generally drawing from local residences, but sometimes a destination in the region. Some of the manufacturing uses, such as Ames Safety envelope and Bornstein Floor Covering, are a major source of employment.

Automotive and related uses detract from the visual and physical environment of a neighborhood retail center. In Union Square, these businesses sell services rather than goods and constitute 12% of the total square footage (i.e. 20 establishments occupying 115,293 square feet). These operations tend to occupy single story buildings utilizing a portion of their lot for outdoor display. This type of use becomes dominant and impacts the visual and functional quality of the district. While this business cluster and some of the manufacturers who also utilize their lots for storage and processing provide local employment, these uses are not compatible with a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood business center.

□ *Rents*

A number of surveys have been undertaken of current rent levels for commercial and office space. There is a fairly wide range of rents starting at \$7 per sq. ft. for industrial space to \$11-low \$20’s per sq. ft. for retail and office space. The rents in Union Square tend to be lower than any of the other competing Neighborhood Squares.

□ *Gross Leasable Areas*

One of the challenges of Union Square is the limited amount of large available space for major new retail or office tenants. The majority of establishments (57%) are under 3,000 sq. ft. There are no office spaces over 24,000 sq. ft. and no retail users, other than Market Basket, over 20,000

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sq. ft. The largest business establishments are warehouse and service uses. For retail space, the challenge is upgrading the smaller spaces for unique specialty retailers and cafes at affordable retail rents.

**Table 7: Square Footage of Commercial Establishments in Union Square**

Establishment Type	1-999 sf.	1,000-2,999 sf.	3,000-4,999 sf.	5,000-9,999 sf.	10,000-19,999 sf.	20,000-49,999 sf.	50,000 + sf.
Offices	1	39	12	5	5	1	0
Retail (incl. food)	5	38	22	7	3	1	0
Service	7	26	12	11	2	2	1
Industrial	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Total Establishments	13	103	46	23	10	6	2

## 2.6 Housing

There are a number of different residential neighborhoods in Union Square, which are reflected in the zoning districts. The majority of the districts are zoned for two family. There are a few isolated areas which are zoned for three and four family units south of the CBD along Washington Street. As one ascends Prospect Hill, properties tend to better maintained owner-occupied single family homes. The general characteristics of the housing stock in Union Square are summarized below:

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the average household size in Union Square is 2.31, which is slightly smaller than the Somerville average of 2.38. 71% of the units in Union Square are renter occupied. In addition, 39.5% of households are paying more than 30% of their income on rent.

The housing market in Somerville is tight, with a homeowner vacancy rate of 0.8% and a rental vacancy rate of 1.6%. The median rent in the city is \$874/month. 27.3% of all homeowners and 36.4% of all renters pay more than 30% of their income on monthly housing costs, with 20.6% and 28.8% paying over 35%, respectively according to the 2000 U.S. census.



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**Table 8: Housing Characteristics Comparison, Union Square and Somerville**

	Total Households	Total Housing Units	Occupied Units	% Occupied	Vacant Units	% Vacant	Owner Occupied Units	Percent Owner Occupied	Renter Occupied Units	Percent Renter Occupied
Union Sq. Study Area	2,160	2,232	2,160	96.8	72	3.2	626	29.0	1,534	71.0
Somerville	31,555	32,477	31,555	97.2	922	2.8	9,656	30.6	21,899	69.4

*Source: U.S. 2000 Census*

Within the Square, there are also several senior apartment buildings operated by the Somerville Housing Authority (SHA) and include Hagan Manor on Washington Street and the Properzi Manor Tower on Warren Avenue. In recent years, a number of affordable housing developments have been renovated or constructed in the Square by the Somerville Community Corporation (SCC).

In 1990, the median household income levels of households within the project area ranges from \$21,786 to \$41,211, depending on Census block group. The lowest income group is from the area between Washington and Bow streets, which contains two elderly housing developments and subsequently deflates the median income level of that area. The most affluent area lies directly south of this area, between Webster and Washington Streets. The median household income average of the six Census blocks and groups is \$38,665.

As the Union Square area is a densely built community, the opportunities for new development result from the reuse of existing properties and, where possible, the assembly and redevelopment of blighted or underutilized, primarily industrial properties. A visual tour of the community indicated that, other than individual buildings and various pockets of deterioration, buildings are relatively well maintained and there are limited opportunities for new development.

The end of rent control in 1995 and the recent escalation in rents and sales prices have led to a serious housing crisis for low, moderate and middle income individuals and families. In response to this crisis, the city has developed a range of strategies and utilizes to the maximum extent State and Federal funding sources to facilitate the preservation and development of affordable housing. These strategies are noted below and described in the Union Square Revitalization Study / Phase I. As is evident from a review of the use of these tools, a combination of strategies is needed to develop new affordable housing. The SCC, the private sector, and various non-profit service organizations have been able to develop a range of housing developments both within existing structures as well through the assembly and redevelopment of blighted property.

**Table 9: Housing Assistance Tools**

<b>STRATEGIES</b>	<b>TOOLS</b>
<b><i>Regulatory</i></b>	
	Inclusionary Housing, Article 13 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance
	Linkage Ordinance, Article 15 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance
	Condo Conversion Ordinance
	Somerville Affordable Housing Trust Fund
<b><i>Housing Services</i></b>	
• OHCD	\$316,000 projected for the following services in Union Square Lead Paint abatement, housing rehabilitation, heating system replacement, First Time Homebuyer training classes, Soft Second down Payment Assistance, Renter Revolving Loan Program, Affordable Housing Rental Incentives, Installation of Window Guards
• OHCD	Housing Study
• The Home Ownership Center	One Stop Resource and Referral Services, Financial Literacy Training, Landlord Training and Certification Programs
<b><i>Organizational/Funding</i></b>	
• Somerville Housing Authority	268 Washington St., Hagan Manor: State elderly housing 24 units 13-25 Warren Avenue, Properzi Manor: State elderly housing 109 units.
• Somerville Community Corporation (SCC)	34 Linden Street: Construction of 42 units of rental housing 33 Bow Street: Restoration of 18 units of affordable rental housing; 8-12 Giles Park: 3 homeownership units (renovation)
<b><i>Non Profit Service</i></b>	
• Catholic Charities	30 bed women's shelter
• Respond	Emergency Shelter and Safe Homes
• CASPAR	50 Walnut Street 25 bed transitional half way house
• Walnut Street	Walnut Apartments for developmentally disabled
<b><i>Private Housing</i></b>	
• Minmaria Inc.	One Summer Street: 7 condos sold at range of prices
• Union Place	411-429 Norfolk Street: 102 mixed use and income development. 18 units for low income residents
• Lake Street Trust	24 lake Street: 13 unit condo, 2 units affordable

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## 2.7 Current Zoning

The Union Square Study Area is comprised of several business, industrial and residential zoning districts. The business core is within the CBD / Central Business District. To the east, south and west of the business core are Business A districts, a Business B district, and an Industry A district. These business and industrial zones are surrounded by residential neighborhoods - Residence A, B, and C districts - which correspondingly range from single-family, two-family, and three or more family zones. The Prospect Hill neighborhood to the north is primarily a single-family district. Other neighborhoods are primarily two-family and multi-family. The following Table summarizes the primary characteristics of each zoning district within the Union Square Study Area:

***Table 10: Existing Zoning Districts: Primary Characteristics\****

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<i>Zoning District</i>	<i>Allowed Uses</i>	<i>Max. FAR</i>	<i>Allow. Height</i>	<i>Parking Req'd.</i>
<hr/>				
CBD	residential, institutional, office, business services, goods, eating and drinking. Most automotive not allowed.	2.0	4 stories / 50 ft.	Varies by use
Business A	residential, institutional, Offices, business services, goods, eating but mostly by SP, automotive mostly not allowed	2.0	4 stories / 50 ft.	Varies by use
Business B	residential, institutional, Offices, business services, goods, eating, & drinking, automotive, commercial & industrial	2.0	50 ft.	Varies by use
Industry A	institutional, business service goods, eating, automotive, commercial & industrial, wholesale	2.0	50 ft.	Varies by use

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Residence A	residential – one and two Family and town house, institutional	0.75	2 ½ stories / 35 ft.	Varies by use
Residence B	residential – one, two & three family, townhouse, institutional	1.0	3 stories / 40 ft.	Varies by use
Residence C	residential – one, two & three family, townhouse, multi-family, artists' housing, Institutional, limited business services	2.0	3 stories / 40 ft.	Varies by use

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*\* The above information is a simplified summary. For a complete description of allowed uses, allowed densities, dimensional characteristics, and parking requirements, please refer to the Zoning Ordinance.*

## **2.8 Economic Development Potential**

The Union Square District is one of two major CBD districts in the City and as such is important for the economic vitality of the community and the increase of the property tax base for the City. Included in this economic picture are retail, office, light industrial, public utility, and mixed residential/commercial buildings. Because of the complex mix of land uses, the economic contribution of this area is multi-faceted. The commercial and industrial businesses provide jobs and income for local residents, which directly contributes to the vitality of the local businesses. These businesses also provide local tax revenue which is sorely needed to support a full range of educational, public safety, and community services.

Unlike housing, a review of the strategies and tools below indicates a less focused effort targeted at economic development in general and Union Square in particular. This planning effort has the opportunity to develop a blueprint for action and an organizational structure to carry it out.



**Table 11: Economic Development Strategies**

STRATEGIES	TOOLS
<b><i>Planning and Regulatory</i></b>	
	Community Development
	Zoning
	Building Department
	Board of Health
	Planning
	Traffic (Parking)
<b><i>Funding/Organizational</i></b>	
• OHCD	Storefront Improvement
	Tax Increment Financing
	Brownfields Economic Development Program
	Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund
•Somerville Local Development Corporation (SLDC) and Somerville Economic Development Partnership (SEDP)	Direct loans to local businesses (\$5,000 to \$50,000)
•National Park Service: Groundwork Somerville	Planning , design, construction of brownfield and other derelict sites for economic development & conservation
• Chamber of Commerce: BIG	Sponsorship of Spice of Life Festival

## **2.9 Transportation & Parking**

Union Square today serves as a roadway crossroads with many thousands of regional motorists passing through, but not necessarily stopping within the Square as their destination. Because several major roadway arterials converge in Union Square - including Somerville Avenue, Washington Street and Prospect Street - and because Washington St. on the east of the Square is a major link to the McGrath and O'Brien Highways and I-93, Union Square and its several signalized intersections serve as a bottleneck in this regional roadway system. As a result, the Square has become highly congested throughout most of the day. Not only does this impede traffic flow, but it also threatens the safety and comfort of pedestrians attempting to cross from one place in the Square to another.

According to the *Union Square Transportation Study*, the number of on and off street parking spaces in the Square is in fact adequate to serve the Square's parking demand - on average. However, there is a *perceived* parking shortfall, and the parking supply is not necessarily evenly distributed throughout the Square. Union Square has several small municipal parking lots to serve the business community concentrated at the center and eastern end of the Square. However, their presence and locations are not necessarily well signed or obvious to newcomers or passersby. Additionally, half the Prospect Street lot is reserved for permit holders and the small lot on Washington Street across from the Post office is often monopolized by Post Office employees and patrons- thereby diminishing the spaces available to the Square's business patrons. Therefore, when combined with chronic traffic congestion, motorists are not encouraged to stop to find a parking space and patronize the Square's businesses.

Union Square is currently served by five MBTA bus lines which stop at various locations throughout the Square. These lines are described below. The total boardings *in* Union Square for the five bus routes serving the Square are 1,307, which represents 11% of the total boardings along the entire routes.

**Table 12: Existing MBTA Bus Routes and Boardings\* for Lines that Serve Union Square**

Bus Routes	Boardings for Entire Route
❑ # 85 ( Spring-Hill – Kendall):	392 weekday boardings
❑ # 86 ( Sullivan – Cleveland Circle):	4,757 weekday boardings
❑ # 87 ( Clarendon Hill – Lechmere):	3,720 weekday boardings
❑ # 91 ( Sullivan – Central Square):	1,970 weekday boardings
❑ CT2 ( Ruggles – Sullivan):	1,192 weekday boardings

\* 2001 MBTA Ridership and Service Statistics

## 2.10 Urban Design, Image, and Visual Analyses

Union Square is not a single homogeneous commercial district. It is a collection of places, sub-districts, gateways, approach corridors, and landmarks that collectively comprise the place known as Union Square. Described below is a physical or visual analysis of the Square's functional and visual attributes.

### ❑ Overall Image

Union Square is primarily a commercial square with many of the features of traditional neighborhood commercial centers found throughout New England's older communities. Most of its buildings are one or two stories in height. The Square hosts several notable landmarks and a number of architecturally significant buildings. It also has a center in the vicinity of the Union Square Plaza - although this plaza's design and utilization has not been entirely successful.

In spite of this commercial concentration at the heart of the Square, many buildings are surprisingly only one-story in height— far below the density and building heights that once existed and far below the development capacity now allowed by zoning. The overall image or identity of the Square is also unclear. This confusion is attributable to several factors. For example, the one-way street configurations contribute to the confusion and lack of orientation because of the many turns required and because the heart of the square is not linear. Many perceive there to be a division of the Square into two distinct parts that are not well related to each other - an eastern end of the square around the SCAT building, Post office, Public Safety Building and Prospect Street, and the more neighborhood-scaled and friendly Bow Street historic commercial and residential area to the west. Also, the mix of auto repair and sales establishments and industrial properties within the Square and along the Prospect Street and Webster Street approaches confuses and diminishes the image of the Square as a strong commercial central business district and weakens the continuity of the Square's street walls at several key locations and gateways.



Subdistricts

#### □ **Subdistricts**

Union Square consists of several subdistricts (not to be confused with the designated zoning districts) each of which functions and is perceived differently. Central commercial and industrial districts are surrounded on almost all sides by densely populated residential neighborhoods.

##### *Central Business District (CBD)*

The heart of the Square or central business district is along Somerville and Washington Streets between Prospect Street and Webster Ave. / Bow Street. It is here that there is the highest concentration of restaurants, convenience retailers and services. It is also here that there is a concentration of offices in upper floors. At the center of this district is Union Square Plaza which is the Square's focal point – although it has not been entirely successful as a gathering space and focus. Because of congested traffic and the wide width of Somerville Avenue, the businesses and restaurants on the south side of Somerville Avenue do not well relate with or strengthen the restaurants and retailers on the north side of Washington Street directly adjoining the plaza to provide a traditional two-sided shopping street. It is also here that the Washington Street Municipal parking lot is located which serves the CBD.

##### *The Hinge Block*

The “Hinge Block” is a sub-area at the heart of the CBD. It consists of the SCAT Building and Union Square Plaza. This block, with the distinguished landmark of the former Fire Station and the public plaza, could become the Square's central gathering space and focus and serve to link the eastern end of the Square with the activity of the Bow Street District. To fully function in this central role, however, the Plaza must be improved and the tenancy of the SCAT building reconsidered to provide more lively and active ground floor uses – such as a café, flower shop, or book store.

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#### *Civic /Government / Community Center Eastern Gateway Subdistrict*

At the eastern end of the Square surrounding the intersection of Prospect Street, Washington Street and Somerville Avenue is a concentration of civic / government uses and publicly-owned land. These community or government uses include the US Post Office, Somerville's Public Safety building (planned to be expanded and reconstructed), and the city-owned former Fire Station. The recently city-purchased Kiley Barrel site lies at the southeast corner of this subdistrict. Because of this public ownership and use, this end of the Square could possibly be further strengthened and reinforced as a civic center – both by considering ground floor uses of publicly owned buildings, tenancy, and the actual creation of public space at this important gateway locale into Union Square.

#### *Bow Street Historic Neighborhood District*

The Bow Street District is a mixture of businesses, a number of distinguished apartment buildings and churches converted to residences, several popular restaurants, and professional offices houses along the historic “Doctors Row”. This district has a more intimately-scaled pedestrian-friendly feel and feels “apart” from the CBD. It in fact functions as a “neighborhood center” even though it is located within the CBD.

#### *Somerville Avenue Corridor West*

Somerville Avenue from Market Basket to Bow Street is a mixture of service retail businesses, residences, and restaurants. Ground floor uses vary – often jumping from a restaurant or hairdresser to a row of two family houses immediately next door. Upper floors are predominantly residential in use. Therefore, both functionally and perceptually, the identity of this corridor is both mixed and confused.

The attractiveness of this corridor will significantly improve when planned street reconstruction and new streetscape improvements are built. As a consequence of this investment, property values are likely to rise. Therefore the direction of this corridor is likely to gradually shift -probably the ground floor of existing residences increasingly converted to commercial use at first, and then subsequently new commercial construction.

#### *Prospect Street / West Boynton Yards / Future Transit-Oriented District*

The Prospect Street district is today perceived as an industrial and automotive service subdistrict and approach corridor that is unattractive and visually marred by scrap yards, outdoor building materials storage yards, and the NStar electrical substation. This approach corridor and subdistrict surrounding the Fitchburg Line rail corridor is functionally and visually apart from the CBD to the north. However, because of future anticipated transit improvements in this vicinity as well as the potential availability of industrial sites subject to future redevelopment, this subdistrict promises significant potential for transformation.

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❑ **Gateways & Approach Corridors**

Union Square is approached from several different street corridors to the east, west and south. They include Washington Street, Somerville Avenue and Prospect Street. At some physical point ( usually a street intersection) along these approach corridors, there is a perceived “entry” or “gateway” into the heart of the Square where a motorist or pedestrian perceives that they have “arrived” at Union Square. Most of Union Square’s gateways are not apparent, are undistinguished, and are not properly marked or celebrated to reinforce a positive sense of arrival.

*Prospect Street Approach Corridor*

The gateway from the south along Prospect Street is not only undistinguished, but unattractive and is visually marred by scrap yards, auto sales and repair shops, and the NStar electrical substation. The gateways into Union Square need to be strengthened and made more attractive to provide a more appealing image to visitors, patrons and nearby residents.

*Washington Street Approach Corridor East*

This link of Washington, which connects the McGrath and O’Brien / I-93 Highway corridor with Union Square is extremely congested throughout most parts of the day and unfriendly to pedestrians. It is a non-descript length of road without coherence or clear image. It is a mix of automotive businesses, a funeral home, residences, the Boys & Girls Club, and only a few scattered businesses.

*Somerville Avenue Approach Corridor East*

Somerville Avenue between Prospect Street and the new Target store to the east of the Square is a mixed-use corridor of housing, fraternal organizations, the Public Safety Building, and several ground-floor commercial businesses with housing above. Because of this incoherent mix of uses, the Somerville Avenue Approach corridor also lacks a coherent image or clear identity.

❑ **Street Wall Continuity & Discontinuities**

Much of the heart of Union Square and the Somerville Avenue West approach corridor are fortunate to have the continuity of much of their “street walls” intact. Continuous street walls provide the potential to create a pedestrian friendly experience if the ground floor uses are active and lively. This continuity is strongest in the Bow Street neighborhood, along the Somerville Avenue West corridor between Bow Street and Market Basket, and along the north edge of Washington Street at Union Square Plaza.

This continuity is most interrupted with parking lots, drives, outdoor materials storage yards, and paved aprons along the south side of Somerville Avenue between Webster Avenue and Prospect Street (the Dunkin’ Donuts being the biggest offender), the Prospect Street corridor, and the Washington Street Corridor East. The south side of Somerville Avenue from Market Basket west has little street wall remaining at all and, as a result, does not feel to be part of Union Square’s more pedestrian environment.



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❑ **Significant View Corridors**

Union Square has at least two important view corridors to distinguished buildings and landmarks that should be preserved. The first view is that of the US Post Office, which can be seen as Union Square is approached from Prospect Street to the south. The second important view corridor(s) is towards the historic marker and stone tower monument atop Prospect Hill.

❑ **Landmarks & Architecturally Significant Buildings**

Union Square hosts a number of architecturally distinguished buildings – more so than many other commercial centers of its size. These buildings strengthen the Square’s visual image and provide the Square with historical anchors. They should be preserved and maintained. Some of the Square’s most distinguished buildings include the Post Office, the former Fire Station ( SCAT Building), the former Police Station on the plaza, the former Bow St. Police Station, Hagan Manor (in a former school building), the Elegant Furniture Building, several churches or former churches (such as One Summer Street), and several distinguished apartment buildings in the vicinity of Bow Street and Carr Square. Barrister Hall, now clad in a metal 1950s-era modernization façade, may still retain its original and distinguished masonry façade beneath that modernization which could potentially be restored.

### **3.0 Strengths**

Although Union Square may not have yet reached its full potential as a vibrant commercial district, it already is a vital and busy neighborhood commercial center with many strengths and assets. This current vitality is evidenced by the fact that there are relatively few commercial vacancies in the Square. The City will build upon these strengths to further revitalize the Square. The Square’s many assets were identified in detail in the *Union Square Revitalization Study / Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area Plan*, which was completed in the spring of 2002. Below is a brief summary of those strengths together with the consultant team’s additional assessment.

❑ **International diversity of population and entrepreneurial spirit**

Union Square is increasingly supported by a diverse ethnic mix of residents, new immigrant populations and business owners who are living in and investing in Union Square. That ethnic mix is providing the Square with a new vital image and reputation as a regional center of ethnic restaurants and food markets. This new population is entrepreneurial and has opened many small business start-up shops in the Square in recent years.

❑ **Reputation of Union Square’s many restaurants and international food markets**

Closely correlated with the Square’s ethnic diversity described above, Union Square has gained a regional reputation as a diverse dining and food market center that draws patrons from throughout the region and city as well as from nearby residential neighborhoods.



Union Square lies within a service vacuum.



Significant buildings, landmarks, and the Bow Street Historic District.

#### ❑ **Transportation Crossroads**

Union Square’s strategic “crossroads” location in the region’s road network near the McGrath and O’Brien highway / I-93 access route and along various arterial street routes to other nearby commercial squares - such as Inman, Central, Davis, Porter and others – is a historical strength. However, it is now also perceived by many as a weakness due to the severe and chronic traffic congestion that results at the bottleneck in Union Square. Union Square is also a major bus hub. However, the Square lies within a “service vacuum” beyond the reasonable service areas of surrounding Red Line, Green Line and commuter rail stations. Nevertheless, thousands of people pass through Union Square on a daily basis who represent untapped potential. Planned roadway reconfigurations resulting from recommendations from the *Union Square Transportation Plan* may help alleviate some of the current congestion and thereby provide better and more convenient access for those who may wish to stop in Union Square. If that can be achieved, then Union Square could become more of a convenient destination rather than simply a place to pass through on the way to other destinations in the area. These passers-by could then become business patrons and customers.

#### ❑ **Significant buildings and landmarks**

Appealing urban places and squares that we all regard as desirable destinations often have attractive or memorable environments, landmarks and buildings. Although Union Square lacks a cohesive visual identity, it does host a wide variety of attractive buildings – more so than in many other competing commercial squares - that gives Union Square character, a sense of history, and attractive or handsome landmarks. The retention of these landmarks are an important element in Union Square’s revitalization. Some of the Square’s many notable buildings include: the US Post Office, the old Fire Station (SCAT Building), the former Police Station on Union Square Plaza, the former Bow Street Police Station, a variety of churches, many historic buildings in the Bow Street Local Historic District, and architecturally distinguished apartment buildings.

The Square and its surroundings also include some notable landmarks and significant identity markers – the stone monument and flag atop Prospect Hill and the “Welcome to Somerville” mural painted on the east wall of Barrister Hall.

#### ❑ **Adjoining high density residential neighborhoods: a core supporting customer base**

The commercial core of Union Square is surrounded on almost all sides by relatively high-density residential neighborhoods that are all within walking distance of the Square. These neighborhoods provide a strong and nearby core walk-in customer base for convenience shopping goods, food markets and neighborhood restaurants. If the Square’s retail mix can be improved and expanded, and if offices can be developed in the Square, this core customer base can be augmented further by drawing additional patronage from daytime office workers as well as from customers further afield.

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❑ **City-owned properties may serve as potential catalysts for new development**

The City of Somerville owns a significant number of public properties in Union Square – the Public Safety Building site, the SCAT Building, the Bow St. Police Station, the Lincoln Park Community School, the Recreation Commission Building on Walnut Street, the Kiley Barrel site, and others – that are located at strategic locations within the Square. If the uses and tenancies of some of these properties can be repositioned to encourage more vitality by encouraging cultural / arts venues, office activity, and even ground floor commercial and café spaces, then the City itself, as a major property owner, can directly leverage these properties to become catalysts for the further and subsequent revitalization of the Square by the private sector and return some of these properties to the tax rolls.

❑ **Active CDC and non-profit community support organizations in the Square**

Union Square and its surrounding neighborhoods are fortunate to have strong community-based support organizations that provide community services and which are major developers of affordable housing. In addition to past affordable housing successes such as the Bow St. Crescent Building apartments, non-profit organizations such as the Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) have constructed 42 units of affordable housing on Allen Street and Linden Street east of the Square; and, the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) is planning the development of a new Head Start Center – also on Allen Street. Both these new initiatives, as well as accomplishments of the past, strongly support the continuing and future vitality of the Square. Other charitable and non-profit organizations in the Square include the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS) and Catholic Charities Foster Grandparent Program.

❑ **Spice of Life festival / growing community spirit and organization**

Community spirit and pride is on the rise in the neighborhoods in and around Union Square. That spirit is most evident at the annual “Spice of Life” festival which celebrates Union Square’s diversity of population and pride of place. This rising spirit and momentum must be built-upon to increase such events, encourage greater coordinated business cooperation and organization, and draw more pedestrian vitality and business patronage to the Square so that Union Square becomes “the place to go to”.

❑ **Future transit potential**

A variety of transit projects are planned for the Square in the future. These include Phases 1 and 2 of the Urban Ring, an extension of the Green Line, and a new commuter rail station on the Fitchburg Line immediately south of the Square. Although many of these initiatives are not scheduled for completion for another ten or fifteen years, these projects promise to eventually catalyze the Square’s revitalization and must be supported and planned for today so that they can best support the Square’s renewal in the future.

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## 4.0 Issues & Challenges

Although Union Square has many strengths and assets, it also faces a number of issues and challenges which must be addressed if the Square's full potential is to be eventually realized.

### ❑ **Lack of clear image, identity and focus**

Union Square lacks a clear and cohesive identity – both visually and from a market or “branding” perspective. This lack of clear identity results from a variety of factors: a confusing street pattern, auto congestion, a place seen as a “crossroads” to pass through rather than as a destination to stop in, and a poor retail mix (except for the Square's strong reputation as an international or ethnic dining locale) which does not offer a wide variety of shopping goods and merchandise beyond convenience items and personal services.

### ❑ **Lack of a successful central public open space or square**

Very much related to the issue cited above, Union Square lacks a highly visible and attractively-designed central public open space or focus that can provide a central gathering space and visual and symbolic identity. Although Union Square Plaza is an attempt to fulfill this role, it is not highly successful. A reexamination of the design of Union Square plaza and perhaps an examination of other sites within the Square to create a true public focus will be in order.

### ❑ **Lack of extensive greenery and tree plantings**

Many people also decry the lack of extensive tree plantings and greenery in the Square. When Somerville Avenue is reconstructed, new street trees will be planted that should begin to “green” the Square. Other planting and streetscape initiatives will also be required.

### ❑ **Inconsistent and confusing mix of uses**

Although the Square includes a variety of convenience and personal service retail shops, restaurants and some offices as may be typical in many traditional neighborhood or town center commercial districts, it also includes a number of automotive repair and sales establishments and industrial businesses that are highly visible and located both within the Square and along key street approaches and at gateways. This mix of automotive, industrial and commercial uses weakens the Square's cohesive image as a traditional neighborhood or commercial business center.

### ❑ **Gaps in the traditional commercial core retail mix**

According to recent surveys conducted during the *Union Square Revitalization Plan* process, there are a variety of retail store types and conveniences that are currently lacking which, if available, would help draw and keep additional patrons in the Square to shop and stroll its streets. Some of these missing commercial uses include a drug store, coffee shop, a bookstore, a health club, and more retail shops selling general merchandise and apparel. The recent opening of the Target store and its pharmacy to the immediate east of the Square may diminish the potential to attract a new drug store into the Square itself or general merchandise stores. On the other hand, the SA Coffee

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Shop opened on Union Square Plaza late in 2002 – thereby filling one of the gaps identified in the survey.

❑ **Competing nearby squares and commercial centers**

The potential for the Square's increased strengths and vibrancy is not entirely dependent on what is accomplished in the Square alone in the years ahead. Union Square is surrounded by a variety of commercial squares and centers that directly compete for the regional shopper or potential office tenant. Some of these competing areas include Davis Square, Inman Square, Central Square, Twin City Plazas, Kendall Square, North Point, Lechmere Square / CambridgeSide Galleria, Assembly Square, and most recently, Target and A.J. Wright to the immediate east of the Square. Therefore, any potential retailer, restaurant, or commercial business which require patronage from beyond an immediate walk-in catchment area will assess the nearby competition and the catchment areas surrounding those competitors to decide whether the catchment area surrounding Union Square is sufficiently wide and free of unreasonable competition to warrant opening within Union Square. With Kendall Square and the growing North Point areas nearby, opportunities to attract office developers to Union Square have to be examined in light of these existing and upcoming competing office centers – both with better access to transit than Union Square possesses.

[There are important exceptions to this rule of nearby competition. At times, a number of similar retailers who are typically in competition with one another can geographically concentrate in one area and actually increase patronage for all by creating a critical mass and regional reputation as a “destination place” for that particular business category so that patronage is drawn from a wider area that otherwise would occur. Examples include the concentration of many furniture stores around Putnam Square in Cambridge, the clustering of antique shops on Beacon Hill's Charles Street, the concentration of restaurants in Union, Davis, Inman and Central Squares, and the famed “Auto Mile” in Norwood.]

❑ **Lack of sufficient daytime pedestrian foot traffic to support retailers and businesses**

At the present time, the business community has noted that there is a lack of sufficient daytime foot traffic to support businesses and retailers. This has largely been attributed to the sparsity of office workers in Union Square who would presumably patronize retailers and restaurants during lunch hours and in the early evening after work. Therefore, some have suggested that the strategy of increasing office uses in the Square would help increase business patronage as well as providing better connections to existing nearby employment centers such as the Brickbottom area.

❑ **Traffic congestion / pedestrian comfort and safety**

Many have previously noted and documented the congested traffic conditions throughout the Square and the resulting hazard to pedestrians that that imposes. Traffic congestion in the Square definitely diminishes the quality and safety of the pedestrian experience in the Square and discourages many from using the Square. Also narrow sidewalks and no buffer from speeding traffic provided by a parking lane or street trees also diminishes the sense of pedestrian comfort and



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safety. The City has completed a *Transportation Study* of the Square to identify some remedies. Additionally, Somerville Avenue from the Market Basket to Bow Street will be reconstructed. Sidewalks will be widened and trees planted – both of which will provide a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

❑ **Lack of large parcels suitable and available for new redevelopment**

If Union Square is to attract new development for large office tenants, R&D facilities, back-of-house office space, large retailers, or housing, sufficiently-sized development parcels must be available. Few such available sites currently exist - although the Kiley Barrel site will be available in the future. Lacking such available parcels, other strategies for providing large development sites may include: 1) assembling smaller contiguous sites into larger parcels, 2) redeveloping large “grandfathered” automotive and industrial sites within the CBD into higher and better uses, 3) renovating existing properties into higher quality space, and 4) possibly adding upper floors to one and two story buildings (although in most instances, this would prove to be structurally difficult and disruptive to existing ground-floor businesses.)

As a corollary, many small parcels with one story buildings in the Square are not now built-out to their full development potential as allowed by zoning. ( Zoning within the CBD District allows an FAR of 2.0 and a height of four floors or 50 feet height.) Therefore, these smaller underutilized sites would seem ripe for redevelopment. However, due to small parcel sizes, there is insufficient space or depth on these lots, depending upon the proposed use, to accommodate the increased parking required to support more intensive uses. Therefore, zoning variances for parking would be required or the required parking standard within the zoning ordinance must be reduced. The use which now requires the least amount of parking per square feet of new development is housing.

❑ **Insufficient prevailing rent levels to support new construction and redevelopment**

To support or warrant new commercial or non-subsidized housing construction in the Square, rent levels would have to be sufficient to support the costs of new development. At the present time, commercial rent levels obtainable in the Square are not sufficient to support new unsubsidized commercial construction. A recent Urban Land Institute (ULI) panel of experts convened by the City to examine the redevelopment potential of the Kiley Barrel site noted that commercial rent levels in the mid - \$30s per square foot are required to support new development. At the present time, prevailing market rent levels in the Square are only \$10 to \$17 per square foot for the second and third class office space available. Presumably, new first class office construction could command higher than the currently prevailing Union Square rents. However, the market has not yet proven that rents in the mid-\$30s are obtainable. Until asking-rent levels rise further, new unsubsidized construction is not likely to occur. First-class renovations of existing buildings might be able to occur with required supporting rent levels below the mid- \$30s. But renovation costs, on a square footage basis, are often not markedly less than the cost of new construction.

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❑ **Barriers to renovation of upper stories to higher and better use**

Union Square has a number of two and three story buildings. Most upper floors in these buildings are now occupied by either residences, office space, storage space, or, in a few instances, commercial establishments. (Notable upper-story vacancies are the uppermost floors of the Barrister Building, the Elegant Furniture Building, and the former Union Square Bistro restaurant.)

To attract higher and better uses and tenancies, such as improved office space, many of these upper floors would require renovation. At present, almost all commercial buildings that are multiple stories were constructed before 1925 and most of those before 1900 in accordance with a building vintage survey conducted by OHCD. Few buildings have elevators. Heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems (HVAC) are often obsolete as well. Neither do these upper floors meet various current building and fire codes in respect to the required multiple means or width of egress (stairs), or fire suppression systems; and, without elevators, many of these buildings could not meet state and federal ADA accessibility codes and laws. To construct elevator cores and provide up-to-date fire suppression systems can prove prohibitively expensive at the prevailing available rent levels. Therefore, there is little incentive for current building owners to extensively renovate upper floors. As a result, the uses and occupancies of these upper floors remain stagnant.

❑ **Poor visual appearance: building facades, signage, and maintenance of the public realm**

A number of factors contribute to an environment that is less attractive and appealing than it could be. Certain properties in Union Square suffer from poor maintenance or unattractive facades and signage. Most visibly, the 1950's -era façade "modernization" on Barrister Hall diminishes the traditional masonry imagery of Union Square. Upgrading building facades, display windows, and signage by the Square's many landowners would go far to improve the Square's image. Fortunately, the City provides a generous façade improvement grant and loan program to building owners who wish to take advantage of it. Recently, the Independent Restaurant's façade was renovated with monies from this program and is now quite attractive. It serves as a model for what can be accomplished under this program. Additionally, the appearance and maintenance of certain public spaces, such as the Union Square Plaza and the edges of the Somerville Ave./ Prospect Street municipal parking lot, need to be improved as well.

❑ **Undefined edges and unattractive "gateways" into the Square**

Street approaches into the Square along Washington Street and Somerville Avenue from the east and to a lesser degree from Somerville Avenue to the west are less than appealing. The gateway to Union Square from the south along Prospect St. ( and from Webster Avenue if that is converted into a two-way street) is particularly unattractive and is visually marred by scrap yards, the NStar electric substation, automotive repair and sales lots, and the Dunkin' Donuts fast-food restaurant and parking lot at the southwest corner of Somerville Avenue and Prospect Street. Since this southern approach may be the site of a multi-modal transit station in the future and develop as a major new entry gateway into the Square, the visual blight that now exists there must certainly be corrected.

Union Square also has poorly defined edges. Many successful neighborhood town commercial centers or districts are compact, visually distinct from their approach surroundings, and have clearly defined boundaries. For example, visitors know when they've arrived in Lexington Center or Concord Center because their approaches are lined with housing until the commercial core is reached. As a result, visitors know when they've arrived at those destinations and therefore those places are memorable and clear in visitors' minds.

In contrast, Union Square's boundaries are not sharply defined. Instead, the commercial CBD tends to bleed out at its edges into a mix of strip business and residential uses along the Square's approach streets on Somerville Avenue and Washington Street. Visually, it is not entirely clear when you've arrived at the place known as Union Square. As a result, the image of Union Square is not clear and can be confused with the commercial strip businesses, automotive sales lots and scrap yards that are on its periphery.



Walking distance radii from public parking lots indicate that the western end of the Square is not well served by public parking.

#### ❑ Perceived parking shortage today

The City's *Union Square Transportation Study* documents that on the whole there is only a *perceived* rather than real parking shortage throughout the Square. However, because there is an *uneven distribution* of parking throughout the Square, there may be a *real* shortage at the western edge of the Square along Bow Street. Moreover, this perception leads to many double-parkers and illegal parkers in handicapped spaces, loading zones, and bus zones. Additionally, Union Square *may* suffer from the commonplace phenomenon of business owners and employees of local businesses occupying the most valuable metered street spaces immediately in front of stores and businesses while business patrons must seek parking spaces further afield from their destinations.

#### ❑ Real parking shortages need to be remedied to support increased development in the future

Although the City's *Union Square Transportation Study* indicates that today's parking shortages are more perceived than real in most instances, there is no doubt that increased development in the future will require additional parking - even if transit improvements are constructed. If such additional parking cannot be accommodated on development lots, for reasons of either limited space or prohibitive costs, then additional municipal lots or a municipal parking deck may be required as a necessary pre-condition to support increased development.

#### ❑ Lack of superior transit service

Many observers of Union Square have noted the lack of *rapid* transit service to Union Square. Although the Square is now a bus hub, it lacks access to *rapid* transit - transit lines, commuter rail, or bus rapid transit (BRT). Lack of such rapid transit service places Union Square at a competitive disadvantage to other commercial centers such as Davis Square, Porter Square, Lechmere Square and Central Square which all have such rapid transit service. Superior rapid transit service is important in drawing *regional* patronage to Union Square's retail businesses and restaurants, but is especially critical in attracting significant office users to the Square in the future, particularly if the

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ability to provide parking is limited. Many believe that future plans for improved rapid transit into the Square will significantly catalyze the Square's revitalization. Nevertheless, Union Square's future can still be significantly enhanced by other economic, physical and organizational measures *before* rapid transit service is provided.

❑ **Brownfield Sites**

Several potentially available development sites were contaminated in the past and must be remediated before they are suitable for redevelopment. There are six 21-e contaminated sites in the project area and three others lie just beyond the Study Area boundary at Mansfield Street and Columbia Street. These 21-e contaminated sites have been identified by the state and, once reported, must be cleaned within five years. Three of the six sites are clustered at Somerville Avenue and Merriam Street, one is at Kiley Barrel, one at L Bornstein Co., and another at the intersection of Bow Street and Somerville Avenue. Other sites are suspected of being contaminated as well; however, they have not yet been tested and are therefore undocumented.

Remediation or site clean-up costs can be expensive and time consuming depending upon the use that is targeted for redevelopment. The most notable site that falls into this category is the Kiley Barrel site at a strategic gateway into the Square. Recently, the City of Somerville financially assisted the developers of the Union Place development on Norfolk Street to remediate their site with brownfields grant monies the City received from the US EPA.

❑ **Availability of relocation sites for businesses or non-profits displaced from future redevelopment sites**

A challenge in preparing strategies for the redevelopment of the Square is finding relocation sites displaced by new development. For example, if the proposed new Public Safety Building is constructed as now anticipated, several businesses, including Ricky's Flower Market, will be displaced. Relocation sites will need to be identified for them. If the existing tenancy at the City's SCAT Building is reevaluated as part of the Square's revitalization strategy, then new sites for SCAT and MAPS will need to be identified as well.

❑ **Issues of eventual success: potential gentrification and high rent barriers to the establishment of immigrant-fueled start-up businesses**

One of the strengths of Union Square is the entrepreneurial vitality of the immigrant and new citizen community of Union Square and the start-up businesses that they create. The challenge will be to maintain business locales that are affordable with sufficiently low rents to allow start-ups to create new businesses.

❑ **Necessity of strong and active business and organizational leadership and management structure**

The Square's revitalization will strongly depend upon active business leadership and organization to coordinate improvements, provide maintenance, and sponsor activities and festivals - such as

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the popular “Spice of Life” street fair. Active and sustained business leadership and advocacy in Cambridge’s Central Square, for example, is widely acknowledged as the genesis of that district’s successful turn-a-round in recent years.

In Union Square, such business leadership already exists, but must become even more active and ever-more inclusive. In the long run, major capital improvements by the City such as the reconstruction of Somerville Avenue to the west of the Square, the redevelopment of the Bow Street Police Station, the reconstruction of the Public Safety Building, and transit improvements will significantly contribute to the Square’s revitalization.

In the short-run however, hard evidence of better care about the Square is most needed. Small improvements such as storefront, signage and window display improvements, placement of flowers out on the sidewalks in front of stores, coordination of evening business hours, sidewalk maintenance, agreements among businesses to encourage employees to park at remote sites instead of at meters in front of stores where patrons wish to park, and sponsorship of programmed entertainment activities to draw people into the Square are all required to spark the Square’s revitalization. All of these small initiatives quickly add up and can be supported by an organized business community with the assistance of the City.

Many of the initiatives described above are ones successfully used in the City of Boston and throughout the country in the “Main Street Program”. The City of Somerville and Union Square’s business community can utilize their community development block grant funding to establish their own local Union Square “Main Street” program. This might include the hiring of a Main Streets Coordinator to manage the business community and city’s activities on a full time basis. This effort will require support from the matching business community.

❑ **Need to demonstrate early successes in achieving immediate improvements**

Many of the public capital improvements planned for Union Square are two, five, ten and fifteen years away. To help catalyze the Square’s continuing revitalization starting today, some early successes must be demonstrated. Some of these early successes can be accomplished by the business community if they undertake some of the initiatives described immediately above.

Other early successes can be accomplished by the City or others. Recently, for example, the Chamber of Commerce placed “Crossroads” identity or branding banners around the Square to help provide a “sense of place”. As an additional example, the Square’s *Transportation Plan* suggests some major physical street and sidewalk reconfigurations. However, that Plan also suggests converting both Prospect and Webster into two-way streets. Such a directional conversion could be accomplished fairly quickly as Phase I of the larger traffic improvement plan. If that conversion noticeably improves traffic flow in and out of the Square, then a major early success will have been achieved without large capital expenditure. Early successes such as these are critical in building support and momentum for continuing and sustained improvement efforts.



## 5.0 Union Square Tomorrow / The Opportunities

### 5.1 Current and Anticipated Public Initiatives

A wide variety of city and other government agencies initiatives to revitalize Union Square are currently underway or are anticipated to occur in the future that will support some of the revitalization goals and objectives cited above.. Some may be accomplished within the next couple of years. Other initiatives are at least ten or more years away from implementation. Below is a summary of these efforts.

#### City Feasibility Studies & Design Initiatives

##### ❑ *Union Square Revitalization Study / Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area Plan*

This Plan, completed in March of 2002, serves as Phase One of the Union Square Master Plan and also serves as the first part of the comprehensive planning approach for inclusion in the City's Five-year Consolidated Plan. This NRSA supports US HUD's goal of marshalling resources, in a coordinated manner, to facilitate entitlement communities' abilities to engage in comprehensive revitalization strategies. The NRSA Plan was submitted to HUD in the spring of 2002. The Plan offers four significant advantages through HUD to Somerville: 1) it streamlines businesses' requirement to track incomes of persons who are considered for jobs under the Low/Moderate Income Area Benefit Job Creation Program; 2) various housing units assisted according to this strategy can be considered as one structure, thereby allowing greater flexibility to carry out housing programs; 3) economic benefit activities carried out under this strategy may be exempt from the aggregate public benefits standard, thereby granting greater flexibility in program design, and 4) public services carried out pursuant to this strategy by a Community-Based Development Organization will be exempt from the public service cap. The NSRA gathered a significant statistical database about the Square's commercial establishments and the area's population, defined the Square's strengths and challenges, outlined redevelopment and revitalization goals, and then suggested a preliminary set of action agenda items for the City to pursue over a one year and five year period for the revitalization of Union Square.

##### ❑ *Union Square Revitalization Study / Transportation Plan*

The Transportation Plan, prepared in behalf of the City by the engineering consulting firm of Edwards & Kelcey, is completed. One or more options are suggested for potential roadway reconfigurations, signalization strategies, pedestrian and plaza improvements, parking strategies, and current and future bus and transit improvements. Existing conditions and future options are illustrated on this page.

##### ❑ *Union Square Revitalization Study / Zoning Review*

This preliminary review, completed in 2001 by OHCD, tentatively suggests potential revisions to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, particularly in the CBD / Central Business District, to encourage desired development in Union Square in keeping with the goals of the NRSA Plan.



Existing conditions



Two-way streets



Boulevard plan

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❑ *Reuse Study for the Old Bow Street Police Station*

The Reuse Study for the Old Bow Street Police Station, was conducted on behalf of the City by their consultants, ICON Architects, Inc. The Study examined a number of different options for reuse of the Police Station, including an Arts & Cultural Center, office space for cultural and/or non-profit organizations, retail shops, and housing. Since the building is within the Local Bow Street Historic District and the National Register of Historic Places, there are certain historic restrictions on its physical alteration. The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) has provided some funding for the building's preservation in exchange for imposing historic preservation restrictions related to the exterior of the building. Following the completion of the Study, the City of Somerville made the property available for disposition and is entertaining proposals for its reuse.

❑ *Public Safety Building Feasibility Study*

Completed in February of 2002 by DiMarinisi & Wolfe in behalf of the City, this Study developed a building program and preliminary design for a new consolidated Police and Fire Department headquarters on the site of the existing Public Safety Building at the convergence of Somerville Avenue and Washington Street to the immediate east of their intersection with Prospect Street. The plan recommended an expanded site to include all properties within the block bounded by Prospect Street, Washington Street, Merriam Street, and Somerville Avenue.

❑ *Somerville Avenue Streetscape Improvements and Roadway Reconstruction*

The Massachusetts Highway Department (MHD) plans to reconstruct Somerville Avenue from Porter Square to Union Square in order to upgrade utilities. As part of this project, OHCD is preparing designs for "non-participating streetscape items" for that portion of Somerville Avenue to the west of the Square from the Market Basket site to Bow Street. As a part of this effort, sidewalks will be improved and widened, street furniture such as benches and planters will be installed, and street trees planted. The street furniture and lighting fixtures that have been selected for this street improvement project will set the streetscape design standards to be used in subsequent phases of street and sidewalk improvements throughout the Square.

❑ *Lincoln Park Community School Reconstruction*

The Somerville School Committee has proposed that the Lincoln Park Community School be reconstructed at its current site.

❑ *Homans Building / Municipal Offices Space Needs Study*

At the present time, the City of Somerville is exploring the redevelopment of the city-owned Homans Building in Gilman Square to house various municipal functions that are now scattered throughout the city in leased space. If these various functions could be consolidated into the Homans Building, cost savings could be obtained since the various leased spaces would no longer be required. Currently leased municipal government functions being considered for consolidation at the Homans Building include: School Committee, various Departments now housed at the existing City Hall Annex, and the COA/ Senior Center now located in the TAB Building. Although this municipal

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space needs study is not focused on Union Square, its recommendations may impact potential revitalization strategies devised for Union Square - including a reconsideration of the tenancy of the old Union Square Fire Station and perhaps the reuse of the Recreation Commission Building on Walnut Street.

### **City Land Acquisitions and Potential Land Transfers**

#### **□ *Kiley Barrel Site***

The SRA / Somerville Redevelopment Authority recently purchased the vacant Kiley Barrel site at the corner of Somerville Avenue and Prospect Street. This site, formerly used for industrial purposes, is seen as a key strategic development parcel at the eastern and southern gateway into Union Square and possibly as a transit-oriented development (TOD) site that will link the commercial center of Union Square with planned transit improvements further south on Prospect Street. Since this site may provide the link between transit improvements to the south and new development on Somerville Avenue at the site's northern end, a right-of-way or easement through this site for this linkage may have to be identified and maintained in any future redevelopment plans.

In the early summer of 2002, the City invited an expert panel from the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to assess the site's development potential. That panel suggested that current asking rent levels in Union Square did not yet support new commercial construction. However, several interim low-development-cost uses were suggested, such as an international market pavilion that reflected the multi-ethnic strength of the Square.



Kiley Barrel Site

#### **□ *Proposed Allen Street Tot Lot***

The City owns a parcel of vacant land on the west side of Allen Street. The Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) owns an immediately adjacent vacant parcel as well as another vacant parcel on the east side of Allen. The City and CAAS have executed a land swap whereby the City has taken ownership of CAAS's parcel on the east side of the street and CAAS would take ownership of the City's parcel on the west side of the street, thereby gaining control of two contiguous parcels. CAAS proposes to construct a Head Start Center on its two consolidated parcels and the City would construct a tot lot on the east side of the street which would serve this neighborhood as well as the new residences of the Linden Street housing development which was recently constructed.

### **Capital Improvement Plans in Union Square by Other Public Jurisdictions**

New roadway, streetscape improvements, and a variety of transit improvements are anticipated to occur in Union Square in the future. Because several new transit modes (Green Line trolleys, commuter rail train service and Bus Rapid Transit) are being proposed along Prospect St. / Webster Ave. in the vicinity of the Fitchburg Rail Line, there is good likelihood that a multi-modal station will have to be eventually provided to allow convenient transfers between these several modes.

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❑ *Reconstruction of Webster Avenue Bridge*

The Massachusetts Highway Department has repaired the Webster Street Bridge over the Fitchburg Line rail right-of-way. Previous plans to replace the bridge have been postponed and the schedule to implement this initiative remains dependent on funding appropriations.

❑ *MBTA Urban Ring Circumferential Transit Service*

The MBTA, as part of its regional Urban Ring circumferential transit initiative, has suggested various ambitious transit improvements in Union Square in its recently completed Major Investment Study (MIS) for the proposed Urban Ring project. These improvements will be phased in over a period of years.

*Phase 1* of the Urban Ring, which is now being implemented, would add one new Crosstown (CT) bus route and upgrade an existing crosstown bus route now serving Union Square. Headways on the CT buses are anticipated to be 10 minutes in peak hours and twenty minutes midday, nights and weekends. Existing local buses would continue to run and serve as feeders to the CT buses.

In *Phase 2*, scheduled to be implemented perhaps as early as 2006 but no later than 2011, the MBTA hopes to initiate improved Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service into Union Square. This service will replace the Phase 1 CT bus routes with one new BRT3 bus route running from Wellington to Kendall via Union Square. It would briefly travel along its own exclusive right-of-way (the Fitchburg Branch rail line right-of-way) for a one-mile portion of its route. Detailed plans as to how this BRT bus running within the Fitchburg ROW is to connect with Prospect Street or other streets in Union Square are not yet defined. A transit right-of-way or easement for this connection may be required through the Prospect Iron & Steel site, M&S Bennett Services site and/or the Kiley Barrel site.

In *Phase 3*, portions of the region's Circumferential Transit service are to be converted from BRT bus service to rail or light rail transit modes sometimes after 2011. Conversion to rail service is *not* now indicated for Union Square, however. The BRT3 route put into operation in Phase 2 would continue to operate in Phase 3.

❑ *MBTA New Union Square Commuter Rail Station Stop on Fitchburg Main Line*

Concurrent with the new Phase 2 Urban Ring Service, the MBTA has committed to providing two new commuter rail station stops in Somerville - one in Gilman Square on the Lowell commuter rail line and one in Union Square on the Fitchburg Line. The Union Square station platform is anticipated to be located between the Prospect Street and Webster Avenue overpasses where commuter trains stopped in earlier years. The BRT3 bus route would serve both new commuter rail stops in Somerville.

❑ *MBTA Green Line Extension*

In a separate initiative, as a transit mitigation commitment for the Central Artery project ordered by Administrative Consent Order of the Department of Environmental Protection (EPA), the MBTA

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has promised to extend the Green Line from Lechmere Station in Cambridge into Somerville and to Medford beyond. The City of Somerville wishes to see direct Green Line service provided to Union Square instead. To that end, the MBTA has agreed to conduct a new Feasibility Study in 2003 to investigate alternative alignments of the Green Line Extension – including options to directly serve Union Square.

Several alternate routes have been suggested by the City. One alternative would extend the Green Line to Union Square via the Fitchburg Branch. Then, the Green Line would turn northward in a new tunnel through Prospect Hill to eventually connect up to its intended destination in Medford Hillside. Alternatively, the Green Line could be extended to Union Square and Porter Square beyond on the existing Fitchburg Branch right-of-way without significant right-of-way expense and without turning north in a tunnel section through Prospect Hill. The City remains committed to working with the MBTA to consider these alternative alignments or spurs which will bring Green Line service directly into the Square.

## **5.2 Current and Anticipated Private and Non-Profit Development Initiatives / Opportunity Sites**

A variety of private sector and non-profit sector development initiatives are currently underway in the Square. Many initiatives are being undertaken by the non-profit sector. The non-profit initiatives and the majority of private sector initiatives involve some form of public subsidy – either housing program subsidies or brownfield program subsidies. Almost all initiatives involve housing or community agency facility uses. Little if any office space is being proposed or developed. Current or anticipated initiatives include:

### **❑ *Linden Street Affordable Housing***

The Somerville Community Corporation is now completing the construction of 42 units of affordable rental housing on Linden Street exclusively available to low-income residents. The development is at the site of a former commercial building purchased by SCC and then demolished in 2001.

### **❑ *One Summer Street Condominiums***

SCC recently sold its former offices - the historic church at One Summer Street – to a private developer, the Minmaria, Inc. That developer intends to convert the church to seven condominium units.

### **❑ *24 Lake Street Condominiums***

The Lake Street Trust has developed a 13 unit condominium development, with underground parking, at 24 Lake Street at the west end of the Square south of Somerville Avenue. Two units are available to low and moderate income first-time homebuyers under the city's inclusionary Housing Policy requirements.



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❑ *Union Place Mixed Use Development*

The first phase of a mixed-use development is currently being constructed at 411-429 Norfolk Street at Webster Avenue. When eventually completed, it will include 102 housing units (condos and rentals), retail shops, a parking facility and possibly office space. Eighteen units will be made available for low-income households. The site is being developed on parcels of land assembled from old industrial and auto body repair businesses. The land was contaminated and had to be first remediated before construction could begin. The City contributed “brownfields” monies awarded by EPA to the City for that remediation effort.

❑ *Family Health Center*

A building on the south side Somerville Avenue at the west end of the Square has been extensively remodeled and converted to a family health center.

❑ *Allen Street Head Start Center*

CAAS intends to develop a new Head Start Center on Allen Street adjacent to the new Linden Street housing development. (See discussion of land swap and city lot above.)

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## 6.0 Hard / Soft Analyses – Future Development Opportunities

A “hard/soft” analysis is a real estate industry term for a method of identifying and distinguishing between those properties most likely to be redeveloped or renovated (“soft”) in the future, and those properties not likely to change (“hard”). By conducting such an analysis, those sites that are identified as “soft” are those likely to lead to change and revitalization to a “higher and better” use.

“Soft” properties are vulnerable to change and redevelopment for a variety of reasons. They may be properties in poor condition or properties that are much smaller than what either zoning allows or what the marketplace would build today. Quite simply, they are properties not built out to their full potential or allowed capacity. Parcels may also be considered “soft” if they are on the market for sale. “Hard” properties are those that are not considered likely to substantially change in the foreseeable future. Hard properties may be landmarks or protected historic buildings. They may be government buildings. They may be buildings already built to their full site capacity, thereby offering no incentive to redevelop further. They may simply be buildings or properties whose owners have no intention of expanding, redeveloping or selling.

### 6.1 Criteria for Identifying Hard and Soft Properties

Properties throughout the Union Square Study Area were examined to identify which properties were potentially susceptible to change and redevelopment in the coming years. These properties, identified as “soft”, are those which may be in the vanguard of the Square’s eventual revitalization. Although properties identified as “soft” are most likely to be redeveloped eventually, there is no guaranteed timeframe in which this is expected to occur – that depends on market cycles and other variables. Some properties may be ripe for change in the coming months, while others may not be redeveloped for five, ten or fifteen years. Nevertheless, these identified soft properties are those which offer the best opportunity to plan for the Square’s future. Underutilized properties owned by the City of Somerville may offer some of the best opportunities for redevelopment since the future of these properties are directly within the control of the City. To identify “soft” properties, the consultant team used the following criteria. The resulting “soft” properties are identified in the following map with the specific criteria used in the identification of each specific property indicated on the map.



#### **A. Properties for Sale or Lease**

Properties that are currently being offered for sale or lease are potentially subject to redevelopment, tenancy conversion, or renovation and therefore may be considered “soft”.

#### **B. Properties Used for Automotive Sale or Repair**

Properties currently used for automotive sale or repair are not allowed uses within the CBD zoning district. Under “grandfather” provisions, however, these pre-existing automotive business uses may continue to operate. Once that business use changes, however, new automotive uses would not be allowed in the future. Therefore, any automotive business parcel within the CBD is eventually subject to redevelopment for new allowed uses once the current business use closes or relocates.

#### **C. One Story Buildings**

One story buildings are those with the greatest untapped building potential according to current zoning in the Central Business District (CBD), Business A District (BA), and Business B District (BB). Current CBD, BA and BB zoning allows an FAR of 2.0 and a maximum height of 4 floors or

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50 feet. Therefore, even if buildings cover the maximum allowed 80% of ground area, at least two floors could be constructed under current zoning.

Simply because an existing building is only one story in height does not automatically insure that greater development could occur, however. Many lots in the CBD are small. Even if new development of greater floor area and height were proposed, there may not be sufficient remaining site area on small lots to accommodate the additional parking required. (In fact, many existing buildings on small lots do not currently meet parking requirements.) Therefore, one story buildings are nominally most subject to potential redevelopment. However, unless sufficient lot size is available to support parking, or unless a zoning variance is granted after Special Permit review, redevelopment to more intense usage may still not be feasible.

A series of one story buildings on contiguous properties may offer the greatest potential for redevelopment since there is the opportunity for an owner or developer to “assemble” a larger property composed of these contiguous properties – thereby providing a site sufficiently large to accommodate significant new development.

#### **D. Redevelopment Currently Proposed**

Properties that are proposed for redevelopment are obviously considered soft. Such properties include the Public Safety Building site, the Kiley Barrel site, the old Bow St. Police Station site, several vacant parcels on Allen Street, and others.

#### **E. Large Properties Used for Surface Parking**

Properties that largely consist of large surface parking lots are sites potentially available for redevelopment to higher and better use. In the Square, the parking lots behind the Citizens' Bank building on Bow Street, for example, together with the one story buildings which adjoin them, offer significant redevelopment potential.

#### **F. Industrial, Warehouse & Storage Properties**

Some properties used for manufacturing , assembly, or outdoor materials storage may be considered “soft” in that they do not represent the “highest and best use” of the land as property values rise around them. Eventually, as values rise, these sites are likely to be redeveloped.

#### **G. Properties in Poor or Obsolete Condition**

Properties in poor condition are subject to redevelopment, renovation, and/or change in occupancy. Examples of such properties include the upper floors of Barrister Hall and the old Chronicle Building.

#### **H. Vacant Floors or Lots**

Properties with considerable and/or chronic vacancies may be subject to redevelopment. Such properties currently include the upper floors of Barrister Hall and the Elegant Furniture Building,

the old Union Square Bistro building, and the Casa Novo Mundo Showroom building on Somerville Avenue at Merriam St.

### I. Properties Where Land Value Exceeds Building Value

According to Somerville's Assessors Office, the land value of many parcels in Union Square exceed the assessed values of the buildings on them. Under these circumstances, it is often more economically attractive for a property owner to demolish the existing building and construct a new building of greater size and value. Properties whose land value exceeds building value often are considered to be "soft" or subject to redevelopment in the future. However, in Union Square, many if not most properties now meet this criteria. Therefore, this criterion may not be a useful one at this time.

### 6.2 Major Properties Identified as Most Promising for Redevelopment

Based upon the hard / soft analysis, a variety of key sites, or cluster of sites, were identified that hold great promise for redevelopment. All of these sites, together with a number of additional smaller sites, are identified in the following map.





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The major sites include:

*Public Sites*

❑ **Kiley Barrel Site**

The Kiley Barrel site, acquired in 2002 by the City is at a major and strategic gateway intersection into the Square. Although it is irregularly-shaped and may need site remediation, its potential for new private development and / or its potential to serve as a link to a multi-modal transit station to the south in the future is significant.

❑ **Public Safety Building Site**

The City has assessed the feasibility of constructing a new and expanded Public Safety Building at the present Fire Station site together with adjacent properties, including the Ricky's Flower site. This project is located at a key intersection and gateway at the eastern end of the Square. Redevelopment of this site will eventually advance when funding is available in the future. When redevelopment does occur, an active use should be provided along the Prospect Street frontage of this site, between Somerville Avenue and Washington Street, that will contribute to the life and vitality of the Square.

❑ **Bow Street Police Station Reuse**

The City has examined the reuse potential of this historic but vacant City-owned building and has declared this property surplus. Possible new uses include a cultural /arts center, housing, retail uses, and/or offices for municipal or non-profit organizations. A Request for Development Proposals for the reuse of this property will be issued in 2003.

❑ **Former Union Square Fire Station (SCAT Building)**

The old Union Square Fire Station is a highly-visible landmark structure and is located at a strategic site in the Square on Union Square plaza. It architecturally links the east end of Union Square with the plaza and the west end of the Square. Owned by the City, the building is currently occupied by two tenants – Somerville Community Access Television (SCAT) and the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers ( MAPS). Neither tenant has a long-term lease. These two organizations are valued contributors to the community, but as tenants, their occupancy does not add life or vitality to the Square. If the tenancy of this building could be converted to retail or café' use on the ground floor and/or perhaps an arts or cultural center as well on the upper floor, this building could become a draw and add immensely to the Square's reinvigoration.

*Private Sites*

❑ **Prospect Street / Webster Ave. / Boynton Yards Phase 2 Industrial Corridor**

Both sides of the entire block of Prospect Street from Somerville Avenue to the intersection of Prospect and Webster is now largely occupied by industrial uses, scrap yards, and auto sales and repair shops. Many of these uses are growing obsolete or are no longer allowed by the zoning ordinance in the CBD District. Therefore, over time, these properties are likely to be redeveloped.

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These sites also lie at the southern gateway to Union Square and will be adjacent to major transit improvements that will focus around the Fitchburg Line rail right-of-way. For all these reasons, the collection of properties in this corridor and those considered part of the Boynton Yards Phase 2 redevelopment area should be planned in a comprehensive way to possibly include new public parking, housing, office and/or retail development.

❑ **South side of Somerville Avenue block between Prospect and Webster Street**

The collection of small properties on the south side of this entire Somerville Avenue block offers significant redevelopment potential *if* they can be assembled into one or two new larger development sites. At present, these properties are occupied almost solely by one-story buildings and are built-out considerably below full development capacity as prescribed by zoning. This block is also one of the few in Union Square with sufficient lot dimensional depth to allow building development at the front of the lots with room in the rear for parking to support new development. Mixed use buildings could be developed with retail stores on the ground floor and offices or housing above.

❑ **Citizens Bank surface parking lot**

The large surface parking lots behind Citizens Bank and the Reliable Market on Bow Street, together with the bank property and the Reliable Market is quite significant in size and is currently built-out far below development capacity. It therefore offers significant redevelopment potential in the future when asking rents can support new construction. The lot's depth and configuration would allow building development along Bow Street with parking provided behind. Mixed use buildings could be developed with retail stores on the ground floor and offices or housing above. Perhaps the property's owners could construct municipal parking as part of their new parking facility (in exchange for zoning bonuses or allocated parking fee revenues) to support businesses and merchants at the west end of the Square and along Bow Street which are currently under-served by public parking.

❑ **Barrister Hall Renovation**

Barrister Hall is in poor condition and its upper floors are vacant. This building could be extensively renovated and offer significant potential for new office tenants. In the process of renovation, the 50's-era façade modernization could be removed and the original historical façade, if still intact, restored.

❑ **Backer Building Renovation**

The Backer Building where Elegant Furniture is located is an architecturally distinguished one. Its third floor, now vacant, hosts a large open space previously used as a dance studio. This building, if renovated could host significant new office space, gallery space, or performing arts space.